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(p. 153)



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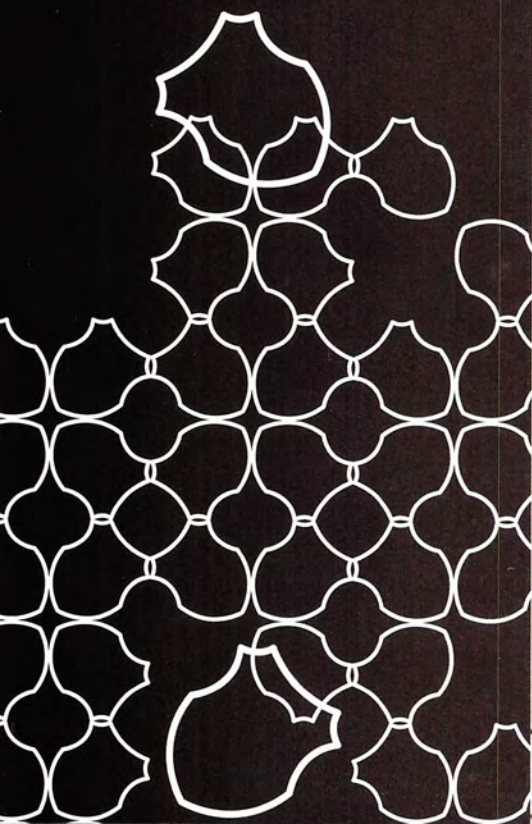


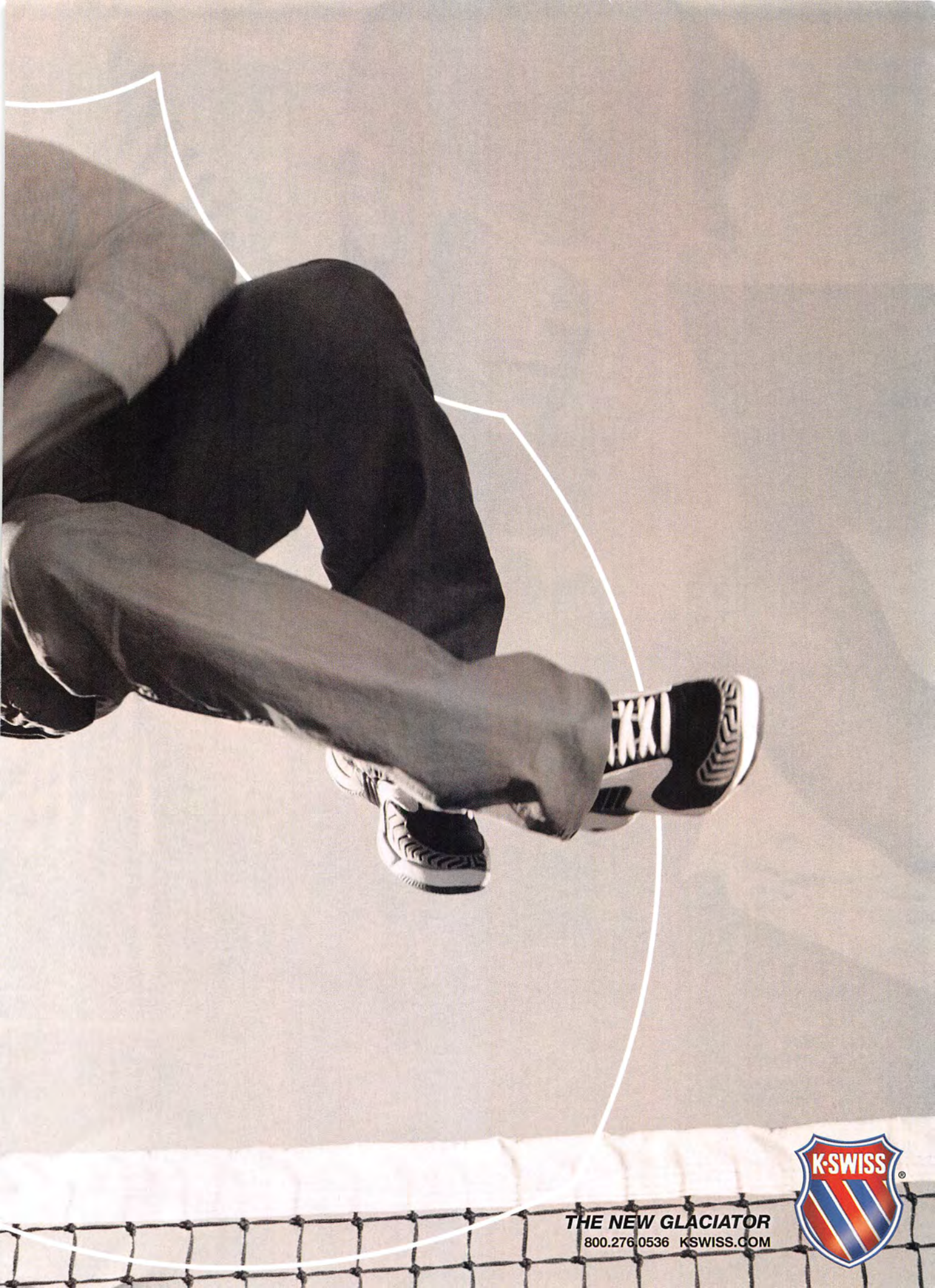
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GUESS

BY MARCIANO

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(80)
"SEX CAN HAVE A
DARK SIDE."
ANTHONY KIEDIS



ON THE COVER

ANTHONY KIEDIS

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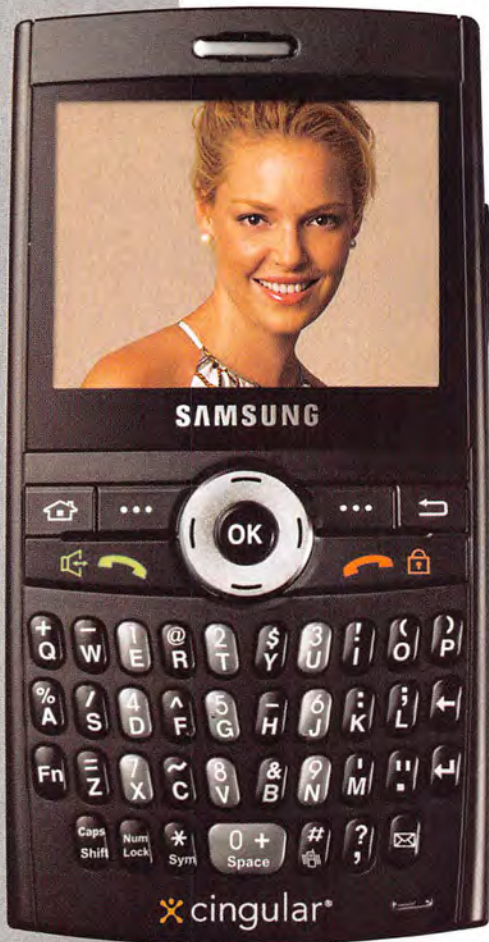


Katherine Heigl
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(160)

"I JUST WAKE UP
AND PROJECTILE VOMIT."

PETE WENTZ



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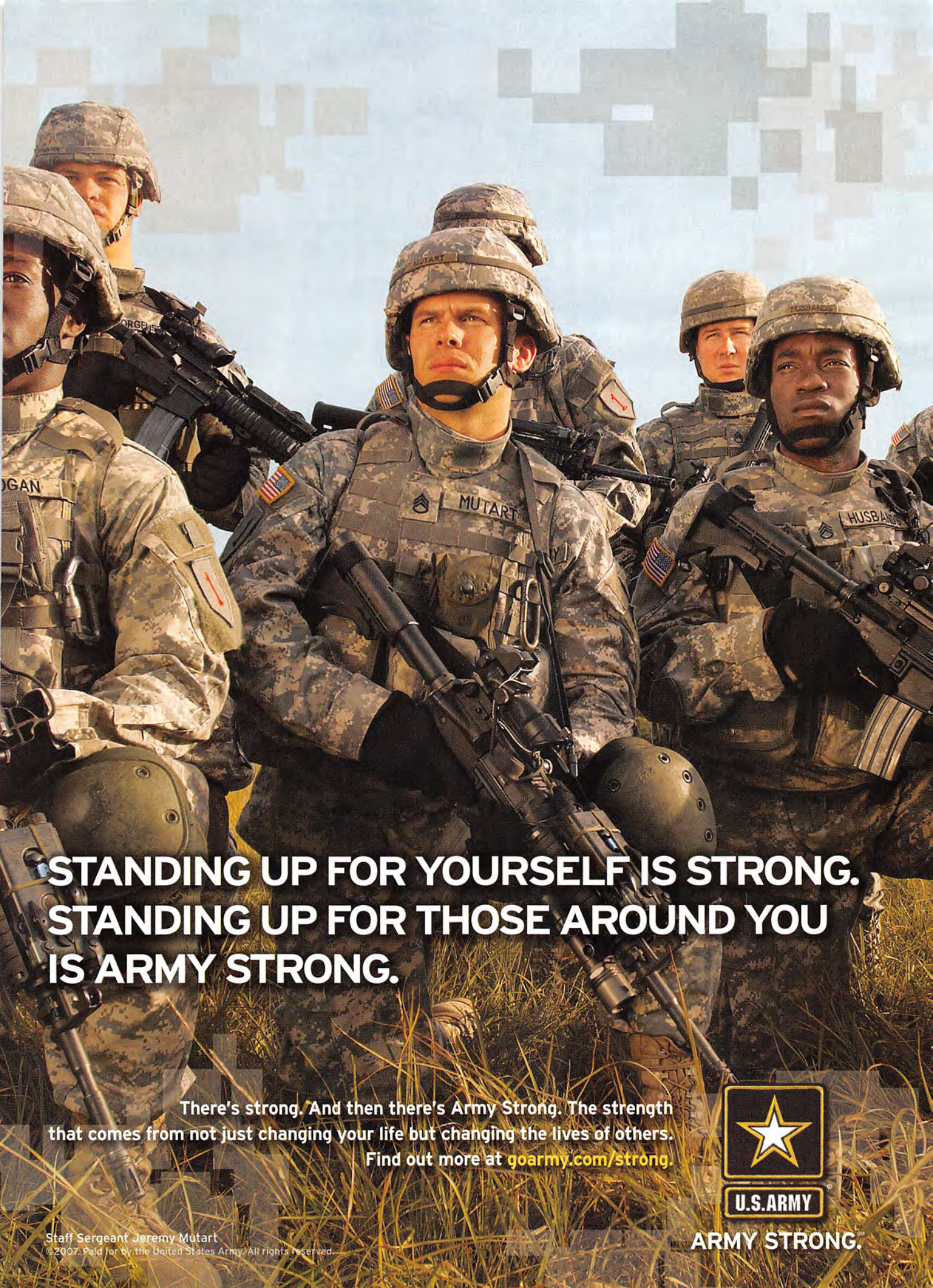
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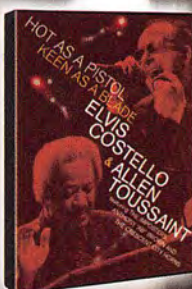
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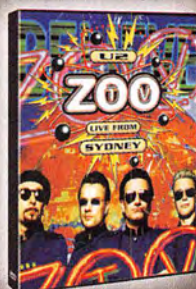
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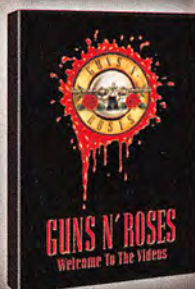
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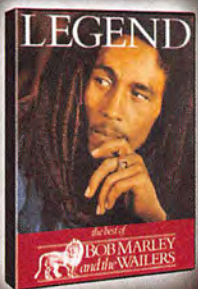
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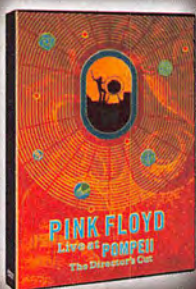
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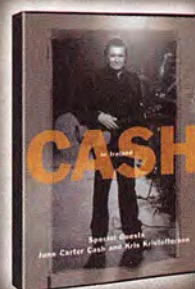
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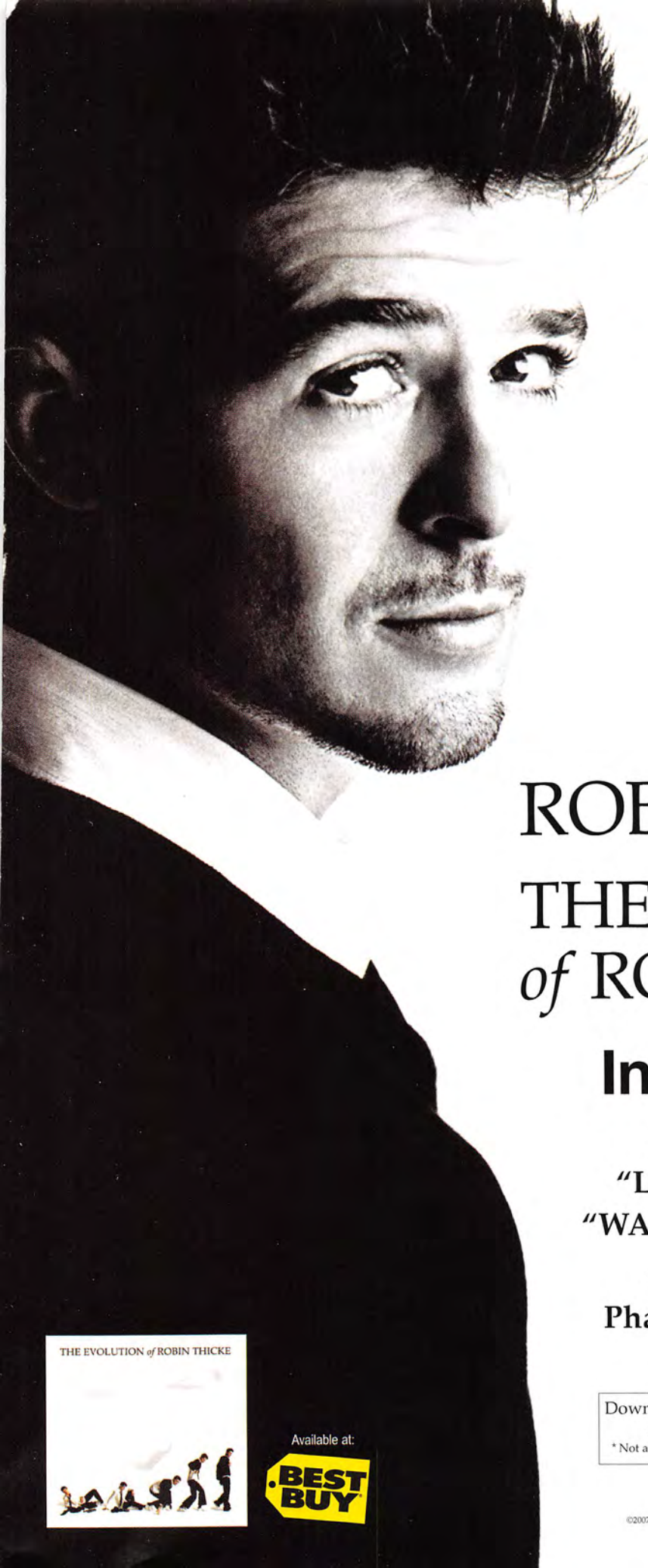
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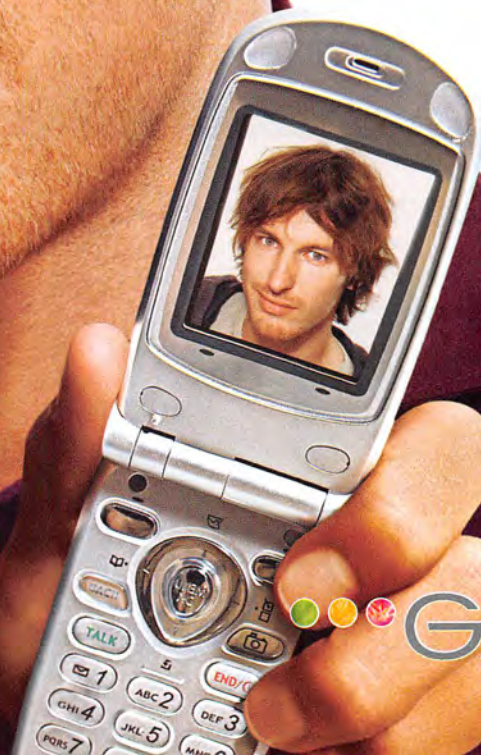
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You've Got Mail

Because Sharing Is Caring ...

Spitting Happy

I loved your roundup of things to look forward to in 2007 ("25 Reasons to ♥ '07," January/February), but I was a little confused by No. 17: Avril Lavigne and her remark about being in a "happy place." I guess that entails constantly spitting on paparazzi.

Jenna Holmes, Ocala, FL

Her "happy place" is actually a ranch house in Salivaville. That's in Canada.

Since She's Been Gone

I am a giant Kelly Clarkson fan—thank you for your preview of her new album. Speaking as someone who listens to "Since U Been Gone" five times a day, I cannot wait for some new stuff to put in constant rotation! (I'm not kidding, I play it five times daily, sometimes up to 10 when it's a weekend or I bring my iPod to school.)

Joanna Jensen, Staten Island, NY

No Joke

Are you kidding me?!? You mean to tell me that Art Brut, Girl Talk and Todd Snider—all bands I've never even heard of—scored above the Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Stadium Arcadium* on your list of "The 50 Greatest CDs of 2006" (January/February)?! It's two discs of amazing!

Joseph Pomranz, Ann Arbor, MI



Avril struggles through a photo shoot after forgetting her Statue Guard.

A Little Lengthy, No?

After reading a couple of your articles, I propose a name change that would reflect the nature of your staff and publication. You should call it *Clueless Hubris*.

George Grimes, via e-mail

Dad? Is that you???

According to Mapquest ...

Wow. When I picked up my copy of *Blender* and opened to the My Chemical Romance article (December 2006), all I could see was CLIFTON, N.J. I'm from Clifton and am always surprised when it's mentioned somewhere, because it hardly ever is. Thanks for calling it "the capital of absolutely nothing at all." That's the greatest honor next to our football team recently winning the state championship. I love *Blender* even more now.

Anonymous, Clifton, NJ

We apologize for the oversight—we just found out a scene from *The Sopranos* was filmed in a parking lot there.

What About the Easter Bunny?

OK, *Blender*, the jig is up. I have known since the first round of "Rock Star Wars" (January/February) who the winner is. I waited as long as I could to write you and tell you this so that I wouldn't spoil everything for your readers. The winner is obviously Led Zeppelin—the "I'm a Golden God" quote by the winner's bracket is direct from the man himself, lead singer Robert Plant. And if you guys didn't already know the winner, sorry. And while I'm at it, there is no Santa.

Trip Dortch, Paducah, KY >>

If Pop Stars Were Dogs ...

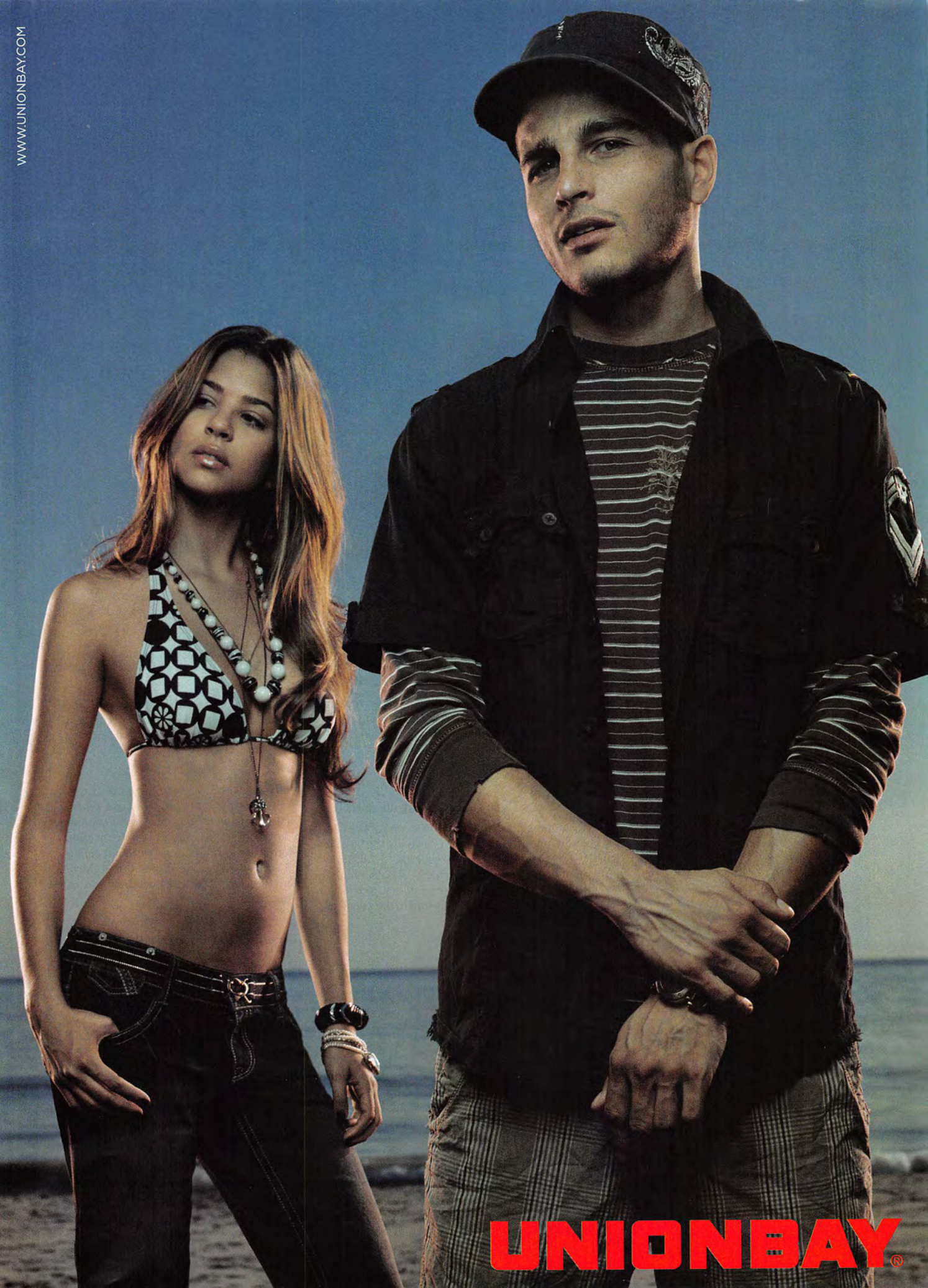
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Modest Mouse:
ready to find
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Cat Power:
She bangs!

Strange Things Afoot at BP

Great piece on Modest Mouse ("25 Reasons to ♥ '07"). One of the coolest things about being a student at Ole Miss is getting to see Isaac Brock and guitar god Johnny Marr walking around downtown Oxford while the band is recording here. But can you tell me where exactly the BP gas station where he gets Indian food is? I've already tried two, and the most gourmet thing they've had for sale was pork rinds.

Jeff MacDonald, Oxford, MS

Go Ahead and Smile

Thank God for Lily Allen! Her song "Smile" (and the hilarious accompanying video, in

which she wreaks havoc on her ex's life) got me through one of the toughest breakups of my life. I can't wait for her album to come out over here—she's adorable.

Vivienne Schremp, Metairie, LA

She Does Have Drugs and Rock & Roll

I cannot believe that Cat Power, one of the foxiest women in music today, is saying the best sex of her year was "the only sex I had" ("All About My Year," January/February). That's shameful! I can think of a hundred dudes (and some chicks) who would happily hop in the sack with her.

Jon Saundersen, Alpharetta, GA

Quite a Pair

Call it the curse of the *Blender* reader! Are any of the couples who were up for Couple of the Year ("The 2006 Noisemaker Awards," January/February) together today? We all saw Pam and Kid Rock coming, but then Eddie Murphy dumps Scary Spice, and rumor has it that Petra Nemcova has dumped James Blunt. Who'd have thought our best hope would be Da Brat and David Gest?!

Tara Macnie, Tarzana, CA

Oops ... She Did It Again

How could you guys award a Crotch Slip of the Year and overlook the mother of all crotch slips, Britney's? I could see her C-section scar in those

shots. Jeez. And for that matter, Kid Rock and Pam Anderson as Couple of the Year? Can I buy you guys a subscription to a newspaper or something? My treat.

Kevin Beherenson, South Plainfield, NJ

Sigh. Yes, we know, we know. Unfortunately, in order to get the reader-poll results tabulated in time for our year-end issue (and your reading pleasure), these truly earth-shattering developments were not reflected in said issue. We regret these glaring omissions. Sincerely. More than you can ever imagine.

Blender Literary Journal

Your article on the Hold Steady ("Band of the Year," January/February) name-checked novelist Jonathan Lethem, lefty-intellectual Paul Robeson and poets John Ashbery and Sylvia Plath. What is this, *The Paris Review*? Why don't you guys stick to the booty jokes—please!

Jonas Flynn, Oakland, CA

Sorry, Kid

This is really weird. Or maybe just weirdly normal: I look exactly like Craig Finn in his eleventh-grade school portrait. I even have the same glasses. Does this mean that I'm going to look like him when I grow up? That sucks!

Perry Kilad, Wickenburg, AZ >>

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DAVID JOHANSEN AND ROSEMARY CONTE

We're Lovin' It

So after reading your *Almost Famous* about former Orthodox Jew and current seedy glam rapper Mickey Avalon (January/February), I proceeded to run into him at a McDonald's on First Avenue in New York. Small world. Though he wasn't that hard to pick out: He was wearing a fur coat without a shirt, tattoos ablaze. Also, it was mid-December.

Sarah Greenbaum, New York

Train Schedule

Of all the stunning, amazing (and mostly useless) pop flotsam *Blender* has shared with me over the past five years, I think the most exciting of them all was in your Dear Superstar interview with Mick Jones (January/February): "Train in Vain" took a half-hour to write and a half-hour to record." With that single statement, the Clash have been reinstated as my favorite band.

Sam Dembero, Akron, OH

We forwarded a copy of the story to Axl Rose to see if that doesn't learn him a thing or two.

A Dollar Short

In your article on Van Halen at the 1983 US Festival ("Vantastic!" December 2006), you stated that the band "earned \$1 million to close the three-day US Festival." In point of fact, Van Halen headlined the second day of the US Festival; David Bowie closed the third day. (The Clash headlined the first day.) Because Van Halen were riding high that year, the band demanded top dollar for its performance. David Bowie gra-

ciously accepted \$999,999 for his performance, one dollar less than Van Halen. I was there, and outside of Burning Man, it was the best party I've ever been to.

Robert Topping, Redlands, CA

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BLUNDER



Kid Rock: "Don't pull the thang out unless you plan to bang."

KID 'RAQ

Kid Rock spent Christmas in Baghdad with the troops, and what he saw changed his life. Here—in his own words—he recounts the Blackhawk rides, guitar jams and random bloodshed

✖ WE ALL KNOW Iraq's a mess, but what we don't know is that it's a mess from the sewers up. Baghdad must not have working sewers, because there are human feces literally spilling into the streets. The smell is insane, and you just have to get used to it. That's the kind of thing we have no idea about over here, but our troops deal with it every day. It's part of why I wanted to spend Christmas in Baghdad: to see exactly what the soldiers are going through, to share some music with them, talk with them, shake their hands and let them know they're in our hearts. No matter what you think about the war, those kids deserve our support.

With all the personal stuff that's been going on with me in the last few months, I've been trying to stay positive. I thought this trip was the right thing to do. There are a lot of directions I could go in, but I don't wanna be flashing my pussy getting out of cars, if you know what I'm saying.

After I'd decided to go, I looked up Sen. Bill Frist's office number online and called it. I'd met him once at the White House, and he seemed like a cool enough guy. In 15 minutes I had him on the phone, and a day and a half later he'd hooked it all up with the Pentagon. I was amazed at how easy it was. I left Detroit on December 22 with an acoustic guitar—>>

flew to Frankfurt, to Bahrain, to Kuwait and, finally, to Iraq. It was about 24 hours of travel. I reached Baghdad the morning of Christmas Eve.

I'd been to Iraq once before, in the summer of 2003, for a show at Saddam International Airport. Back then, it was like, "Hurray, we won! We fucking tore this country up, and rightfully so." This time it's like, "... hmmm." Flying out from Kuwait to Baghdad, I was waiting for a C-130 plane and I saw six coffins draped in flags, carrying what they call "HR"—human remains—back to the States. I felt really conflicted. I've always believed war is necessary for our freedom, but when you're out there and you see the tragedy of it, you think, "There's nothing right with war." I was constantly humbled by the sacrifice these kids make to bring freedom to other people.

A captain and a former drill sergeant showed me around, ripping through Baghdad in Humvees and jumping into Blackhawks. I visited seven bases in five days and played four concerts. I heard a lot of stories from soldiers I met, ranging from "Hey, I hooked up this school so these kids have fresh water" to "I'm policing this neighborhood where there's 10 murders a night, 2-year-old kids get shot in the head and teenagers are tortured."

Mostly, though, I wanted to take their minds off of all that stuff, and they appreciated the entertainment. I'd play "Cowboy," "Sweet Home Alabama" and a song of mine called "If I Was President," about smoking a joint on Air Force One, just to make them laugh. Once, while I was waiting for a helicopter, I taught some soldiers how to play blues guitar. I used a .50 caliber bullet: They got a kick out of that.

A lot of the soldiers didn't know I was coming. At one camp they said, "We can't believe you're here, no one ever comes here." That freaked me out a bit, 'cause it meant I was really on the outskirts.

The sound of gunfire and mortars in the distance was pretty constant the whole time. I had to wear a flak jacket and helmet weighing 60 pounds everywhere I went. But nothing prepared me for Christmas Day. I got word that three soldiers in a Hummer had been hit by an IED [Improvised Explosive Device], and the captain asked me if I wanted to visit them. He told me it'd make 'em feel better, so I got in a Hummer myself—talk about a mind fuck—and headed for the hospital. That was a scary fucking ride. I started thinking about where I was, about my own son and about these guys getting hit on Christmas. I got there about 10 minutes



Rockin' the casbah (clockwise from top): Kid Rock with troops; at one of Saddam's palaces; in a Blackhawk; visiting the wounded.



after the soldiers did, and I was stunned. The hallways were packed with people. The doctors didn't think one of the soldiers was going to make it, and this chaplain was rushing upstairs to be with him. The other two

see me—like, "Kid Rock! What the fuck?!"—and I was just as shocked to see them.

It amazes me the number of soldiers I talked to who finish up a tour of duty and *want* to go back. They truly believe they're helping these people. One day I toured some of Saddam's palaces, covered with marble and gold, and these guys with me said, "We know Saddam had to go, but you gotta hand it to him: He knew how to keep this country in line." Our guys are trying to do it with democracy, but you could hear their frustration. One of the higher-ranking guys I sat down with said, "We don't create policy, we execute it." And that's the thing. Whether it's a right war or a wrong war, they've got their papers and they've got to fight.

My flight back was like none I've ever taken. Everyone—black, white, male, female—was telling stories and laughing, just excited to go home. Also, Iraq is a dry country: I heard beer cans popping everywhere. *ASTOLD TO JONAH WEINER*

"THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE WAS PRETTY CONSTANT. I HAD TO WEAR A FLAK JACKET AND HELMET EVERYWHERE I WENT."

were shaken up, cut up, bleeding from their ears, and they were convinced their buddy was about to die. So they were shocked to

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RALPH!

PARIS HILTON

IGNORES JAY-Z, THEN PUKES FROM STAGE



In Vegas, Paris Hilton watched Jay-Z perform. According to witness Joshua Radin, she "pulled a compact out of her bag every six minutes to stare at herself and pose."



Posting on his MySpace page, Radin said Hilton was "swilling from a Grey Goose bottle." Then, after Jay's set, she jumped onstage to lip-sync to her own songs.



Hilton then leaned to the side of the stage and vomited, after which she hurried off—never quite finishing her impromptu "performance."

NEWS ROUNDUP

NICK LACHEY has proposed a joint tour with labelmate Britney Spears. "Britney has that quality about her that people want to root for," he said.

Supermodel **HEIDI KLUM** released her debut single, "Wonderland," on Warner Music. Her husband, Seal, records for the same company.

SNOOP DOGG launched a line of dog toys and clothing, featuring hoodies and basketball jerseys. The oft-arrested rapper was quoted as saying, "Go get some quick, doggone it! 'Cause Snoop Dogg said so. Bow wow!"

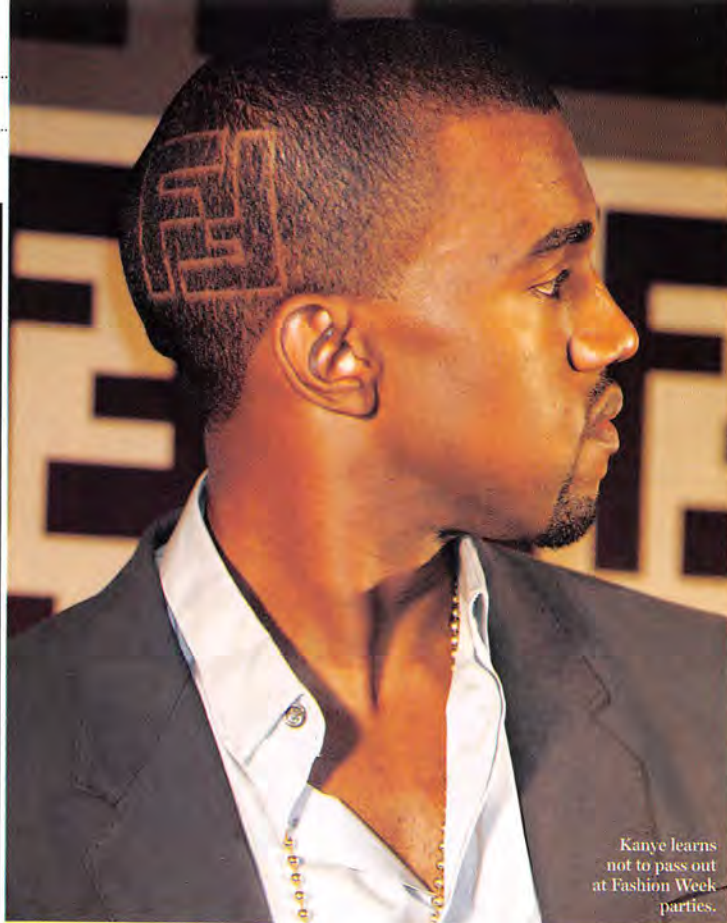
Playboy.com recently had rapper **THE GAME** photograph Cidney Carson for a nude pictorial.

WORD!



"WHEN PEOPLE SAY I CAN'T SING, IT'S LIKE INSULTING GOD."

FERGIE ON HER BELIEF THAT HER VOICE IS A GIFT FROM GOD



Kanye learns not to pass out at Fashion Week parties.

RENTAL DOME

KANYE WEST SELLS HEAD AS BILLBOARD, GETS SUED BY EVEL Knievel FOR "VULGAR FILTH"

PERFORMING AT A Fendi party at the Tokyo Olympic Stadium, Kanye West dressed for success by shaving the Italian fashion company's signature FF onto the side of his head. Fendi reportedly paid the "Jesus Walks" rapper \$100,000, in addition to his appearance fee.

Not everyone is pleased with West's branding concepts. Evel Knievel is suing the rapper for adopting the daredevil's persona in the music video for "Touch the Sky." In the video, West dons a red-white-and-blue jumpsuit, gets on a motor-

cycle, attempts to span the Grand Canyon and is groped by Pamela Anderson.

The trademark-infringement suit claims that West's video contains "vulgar and offensive sexual images, language and conduct involving women apparently trying to gain [West's] sexual interest."

"That video is the most worthless piece of crap I've ever seen in my life," the iconic stuntman said. "And he uses my image to catapult himself on the public and promote his filth to the world." *Victoria De Silverio*

WEIRD BAND ALERT

BANG CAMARO

A BOSTON HAIR-METAL BAND WITH A LOT OF LEAD SINGERS

SO, ONE VOCALIST ISN'T ENOUGH?

Apparently not. The band, which uses anywhere from 12 to 19 singers, replicates the anthemic, arena-ready choruses of '80s hair-metal bands, without the help of backing tracks. To pull it off, especially the three-part harmonies, guitarist Alex Necochea says they "needed the manpower."

GREAT, SO THIS ISN'T A JOKE?

"When people see us perform," says guitarist Bryn



"Just the ladies this time! Oh ... right."

Bennett, "they take us completely seriously. It's not like we are wearing mullet wigs and spandex."

SCHEDULING MUST BE A CLUSTERFUCK, NO?

"We just promise them all beer and everyone's there," says Bennett. *Tony McMenamin*



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But make sure it is not an important piece
you may ultimately need later.



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Springsteen spies a non-union roadie.

WHEN WILL YOUR FAVORITE POP STAR CROAK?

#35 BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

BIRTH DATE SEPTEMBER 23, 1949

CURRENT AGE 57

DEATH CALCULATOR STARTS AT AGE 79

CATEGORY YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED

White male (-2); mother is Italian (+1); father is Irish (-2) -3

Bad relationship with father: They "fought all the time ... over almost everything" -2

Love life: Divorced first wife after having an affair (-2) with bandmate Patti Scialfa, whom he married 15 years ago (+3); they have three children (+3) +4

Success: Inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1999; won 13 Grammys and an Academy Award; has enjoyed over three decades as a major musical artist +1

Spirituality: Raised Catholic; "a lot of [my music] traces back to gospel roots" +2

Positive outlook: "When it comes to luck, you make your own." -1

Physical health: Toned and trim body (+1); has cardio stamina for four-hour-long live shows (+1) despite near-life-threatening injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident, which caused him to fail a physical exam for the Vietnam draft in 1968 (-4) -2

Eating habits: Employed same personal chef as the King of Saudi Arabia +1

Stress: Has battled exhaustion and depression -5

Controversy: Accused of being a "fucking dirtbag" and a "floating fag" after releasing police-criticizing song "American Skin." -1

Media scrutiny: Media say Bruce's marriage is "on the rocks." -2

ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY 73

PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH 2022

Gerontologist **DR. DEMKO**: "Springsteen's issues with authority appear to draw him into confrontations. Working on conflict-resolution skills would be a definite year-adding strategy."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Flamboyant disco-rock group **SCISSOR SISTERS** appeared on two episodes of the daytime television drama *Passions*. The group played themselves and performed songs from their new album, *Ta-Dah*.

HEATHER MILLS, estranged wife of Paul McCartney, is representing herself in divorce court to avoid lofty lawyer bills. Mills stands to gain anywhere from \$39 million to almost \$200 million of the former Beatle's fortune.

The Oklahoma City Council has voted to christen one of the city's dark and littered alleys "Flaming Lips Alley" in honor of the Oklahoma City band. Singer **WAYNE COYNE** is hoping the name will spark some creative refurbishment of the rundown street. "I could see people sneaking in during the middle of the night doing graffiti art," he says.

WORD!



"I WANT TO BE ON EARTH. I WANT TO BE NORMAL."

BEYONCÉ



Nixon didn't expect the Elvis hand buzzer.

SUSPICIOUS MINDS

NEWS FLASH: ELVIS CLAIMED "IN-DEPTH" KNOWLEDGE OF DRUGS DURING HIS STRANGE MEETING WITH NIXON

✚ THIRTY-SIX YEARS after a bizarre meeting between Elvis Presley and President Richard Nixon, a photo of the two shaking hands remains the most requested document in the National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

In celebration of what would've been the King's 72nd birthday, a new exhibit at the Richard Nixon Library includes artifacts from the December 21, 1970, tête-à-tête, including Presley's outfit (black velvet overcoat, a gold-plated belt and black leather boots), the WWII Colt .45 pistol he gave Nixon and the five-page handwritten note Presley passed to a White House guard from his limo.

"I will be here as long as it takes to get the credentials of a Federal Agent," Presley wrote in the largely

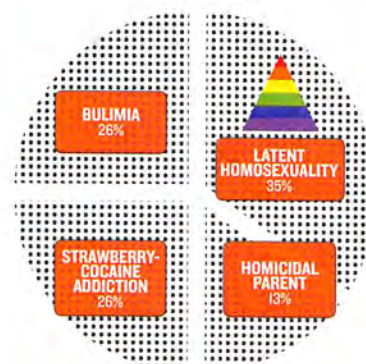
illegible letter scribbled on American Airlines stationery. "I have done an in-depth study of drug abuse and Communist brainwashing techniques and I am right in the middle of the whole thing where I can and will do the most good."

After being allowed entry to the Oval Office, Presley showed Nixon his collection of police badges from around the country and expressed his interest in returning respect to the American flag by reaching young people who were involved in drugs and protests. A White House memo documenting the encounter said Presley voiced concern that the Beatles had been spreading anti-American spirit abroad, to which Nixon "nodded in agreement and expressed some surprise." *Noel Boddie*

BLENDER'S BURNING QUESTION

WHICH SKELETONS WILL THE NEW **AMERICAN IDOL** HOPEFULS HAVE IN THEIR CLOSETS?

SURVEY SAYS



READER WISDOM

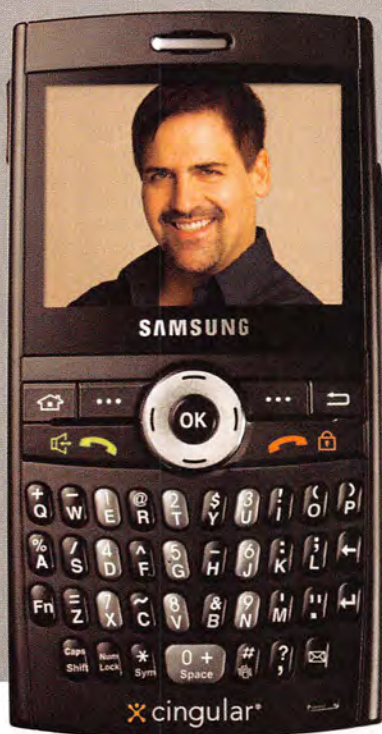
"WE'VE HAD GAY, BUT HOW ABOUT A LESBIAN?"

AJ KRAMER, VIRGINIA BEACH, VA

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HOW TO ...

START YOUR OWN BUSINESS

HAVING BUILT AN EMPIRE AS BOTH RAPPERS AND, WELL, DRUG KINGPINS, VIRGINIA BEACH BROTHER ACT **CLIPSE** OFFERS UP SOUND ENTREPRENEURIAL ADVICE

(By Steve Kandell * Photograph by Kenneth Cappello)

1

FIND A NEED, FILL A NEED

Malice: "If you have a good commodity, your services will be needed everywhere—it's supply and demand. Start out in your own hood, where people know you. Find good employees who have the business's best interests at heart and can bring in revenue. Conduct yourself in a low-key manner—don't bring anything of a flamboyant nature to the work area."

2

BUILD A CLIENT BASE

Pusha T: "Establish a reputation for having the best product—give away free samples to prove it. It might mean taking a loss, but that's what you do to be known. There ain't no marketing plan, it's all word of mouth. People are loyal to whoever has the best. The market determines prices. Whatever money the customer has, that's what you charge."

3

MARK YOUR TERRITORY

Pusha T: "When your operation begins to grow, ensure your product is the only one being worked in the area. Outsiders tend to not play by the rules, and that's when bad things happen. Any intrusion must be addressed immediately. Handle competition with proper etiquette—rivals can get along, as long as everyone stays in their proper lanes."

4

EXCEL IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

Malice: "See, that's one of the things about the business we're in: We can enforce a strict no-refund policy. But you must always be open and available to handle problems that come up. If we hear a complaint from a customer, that means the product was not up to snuff. We deal with those situations internally—punishment by removal. You *don't* want to be removed."

From left:
Pusha T and
Malice.



"WHATEVER MONEY THE CUSTOMER HAS, THAT'S WHAT YOU CHARGE."

Out Now: *Hell Hath No Fury* (Re-Up/Jive)

STYLING: MIKE BOGARD FOR THE B. LYNN GROUP; ON PUSHA T: SUIT, VALENTINO; SHIRT, NORDSTROM; TIE, CLIP; ALFRED DUNHILL; POCKET SQUARE, PURPLE LABEL BY RALPH LAUREN; SHOES, BERLUTI. ON MALICE: SUIT, GUCCI; SHIRT, POCKET SQUARE, PURPLE LABEL BY RALPH LAUREN; TIE, FAÇONNABLE; POCKET SQUARE, PURPLE LABEL BY RALPH LAUREN; SHOES, BERLUTI.



POP-STAR MUST-HAVE

MARCHING-BAND JACKETS

AFTER YEARS OF SWIRLIES, DRUM MAJORS GET THEIR REVENGE



ALICIA KEYS



BRANDON FLOWERS



KANYE WEST



MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE

NEWS ROUNDUP

Since performing the song "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" at his wedding to Katie Holmes, **TOM CRUISE** has announced that he may be embarking on a recording career. Several music executives allegedly have voiced interest.

JACK OSBOURNE will return to reality television in *Armed & Famous*, a new CBS series that trains celebs like LaToya Jackson, Erik Estrada and Wee Man for the Muncie, Indiana, police force.

In a tribute to Dolly Parton at the Kennedy Center Honors, **JESSICA SIMPSON** flubbed the lines of "9 to 5," muttered "So nervous" and ran off the stage before finishing. After the show ended, Simpson sang the tune again, but the number was dropped entirely from the televised broadcast.

WORD!



"OPRAH HAS BECOME A MIDDLE-AGED WHITE AMERICAN WOMAN."

50 CENT



FOUND CRAP #2

WE TUBE ... YOU TUBE

HIP-HOPPELGÄNGER

CHAMELEON COMEDIAN **ARIES SPEARS** UNCANNILY IMPERSONATES FOUR HIP-HOP HEAVY HITTERS

BACKSTORY

Bringing music piracy to uncharted territory, *MadTV*'s Aries Spears doesn't just steal artists' songs, he jacks their identities. In this two-minute video, the Rich Little of hip-hop appears on the *Mornings With Woody, Tony & Ravey* show on San Francisco's KITS Live 105, freestyling flawless impressions of LL Cool J, Snoop Dogg, DMX and Jay-Z over the beat of M.O.P.'s 2000 banger "Ante Up."



EYEWITNESS



"It was all kind of a fluke," explains Greg Gory, the show's producer, visible in the background of the video "looking like a moron." The scheduled guest for the day's show was the actual Snoop Dogg, a friend of Spears's, but his arrest the prior night rendered him unable to attend.

AFTERLIFE

Spears would be the perfect supernatural conduit for a long-coveted Biggie/Tupac posthumous collaboration album. Just one catch: "The closest thing I can do to Biggie is sounding like I have a breathing problem."



HOW TO FIND IT

"Aries Spears" + "Live 105" + "Snoop" Russ Heller

MAGIC TOUCH

"LADY IN RED" SINGER HEALS PEOPLE WITH HIS HANDS

In an interview on British television, singer Chris de Burgh claimed that he possesses the power to cure people with his hands.

"I met someone in the West Indies who was not able to walk," said de Burgh, who scored a hit in 1986 with the song "Lady in Red." "I put my hands on him and he was able to get up."

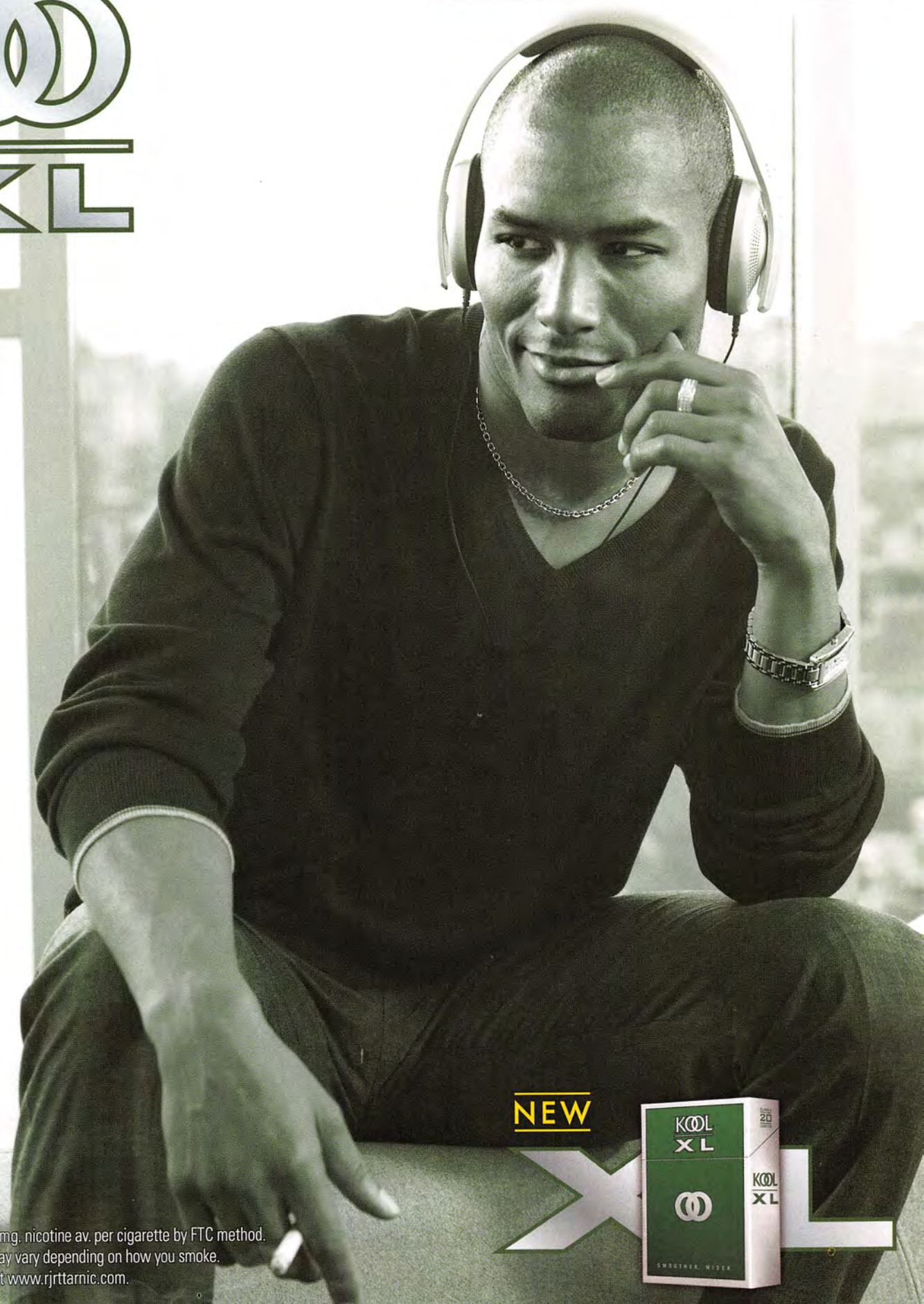
In 2001, de Burgh also appar-



De Burgh: "Jazz hands!"

ently helped cure a professional soccer player of a paralyzing nerve disorder by lighting a crystal lamp and passing his hands over the player's legs. David Peisner

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(ALMOST FAMOUS)

PAGODA

INDIE-FILM STAR TRADES SOUNDSTAGES FOR SOUND CHECKS WITH HIS (SURPRISINGLY GOOD) NOISE-ROCK TROUPE

By Jonah Weiner ✕ Photograph by Kenneth Cappello

✕ MICHAEL PITT HAS a greasy black smear across his cheek and days-old dirty-blond stubble. His tattered T-shirt isn't distressed so much as destroyed. It's just past noon, and the 25-year-old actor is at his band's Brooklyn practice space, holding a crusty bottle of Kahlúa. He takes a swig, screws his face up, then takes another. He's got a borderline-homeless vibe that suits his current incarnation—scruffy frontman of art-punk band Pagoda—far better than his more famous incarnation—doe-eyed darling of the Sundance set.

Pagoda, fleshed out by drummer Reece Carr, bassist Willy Paredes, and cellist Christopher Hoffman, isn't a

passing whim. Pitt says that, growing up the son of an auto mechanic in suburban New Jersey in the '80s, he fell in love with music before his acting career took off. "Actually, first I wanted to be a painter," he says. "Then I wanted to be a writer. Then I wanted to be a musician." By his early teens, his musical idols were Sonic Youth and the Pixies. "I didn't grow up in a very artistic place, though, and so I felt like a total freak."

That outsider sense informs Pitt's roles—such as his magnetic weirdos in *Last Days* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*—and Pagoda's haunting, off-kilter music, too, in which Pitt moans and snarls about little fetuses and

ALL ABOUT US!

RECOMMENDED READING

"Confessions of an Economic Hit Man. It's about how the World Bank loans third-world countries money at interest rates they can't possibly pay back, to keep them in the third world." (Hoffman)

FAVORITE BAND

"Battles. They're like punk-rock Kraftwerk." (Carr)

SONG ON THE RADIO WE CAN'T STAND

"Who even listens to the radio, man?" (Pitt)

anthrax over dark, Nirvana-tinged riffs. It's music that draws you in without sounding particularly hospitable.

Insistent that he's not merely pulling a Keanu with this band, Pitt claims he has put his acting career on hold indefinitely. "This," he says, waving a hand at the amp- and cable-strewn loft, "is where my head's at now." He takes another swig of Kahlúa. "Most likely it's going to stay in that direction for a while."

Out Now *Pagoda* (Estatic Peace)

Pagoda, from left: Michael Pitt, Reece Carr, Willy Paredes, Christopher Hoffman.



"I DIDN'T GROW UP IN AN ARTISTIC PLACE, SO I FELT LIKE A TOTAL FREAK."



PREPARE FOR GLORY!

INSPIRED BY GRAPHIC NOVELIST
FRANK MILLER

300

WARNER BROS. PICTURES PRESENTS
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GERARD BUTLER "300" LENA HEADEY DAVID WENHAM AND DOMINIC WEST MUSIC BY TYLER BATES EDITED BY WILLIAM HOY, A.C.E. PRODUCTION DESIGNER JAMES BISSELL
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY LARRY FONG EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DEBORAH SNYDER FRANK MILLER CRAIG J. FLORES THOMAS TULL WILLIAM FAY BENJAMIN WAISBREN
BASED ON THE GRAPHIC NOVEL BY FRANK MILLER AND LYNN VARLEY SCREENPLAY BY ZACK SNYDER & KURT JOHNSTAD AND MICHAEL B. GORDON
PRODUCED BY GIANNI NUNNARI MARK CANTON BERNIE GOLDMANN JEFFREY SILVER DIRECTED BY ZACK SNYDER

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Mario Batali is not amused by your wiener jokes.



WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK!

MARIO BATALI

THE CELEBRITY CHEF SHARES HIS FAVORITE TUNES TO BLAST WHILE PREPARING HIS HOMEMADE SAUSAGES

"ACHILLES LAST STAND" (Led Zeppelin)

"The first step—pushing big chunks of meat and fat through a grinder—is kind of loud and monotonous, so a throbbing song with a little zip and a lot of drang is needed."

"SHE TALKS TO ANGELS" (The Black Crowes)

"A Zen moment that feels like cascading spices, with a kind of religious fervor, is best when adding the seasoning to the meat."

"IN MEMORY OF ELIZABETH REED (LIVE)" (The Allman Brothers Band)

"A pensive song like this one (that lasts around 13 minutes) is good because the next step—carefully mixing and remixing the meat and the spices by hand—takes about 20 minutes."

REVEAL (R.E.M.)

"I need a whole album for the next bit, since it's the longest step. As I shoot the meat through a gun into the casings and then tie them up, this keeps me focused and happy."

"MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK" (Radiohead)

"This stoney tune is perfect for when you shape the casings onto the rack to dry."

NEWS ROUNDUP

Dirty South rapper **YOUNG JEEZY** has offered a \$2,500 college scholarship to the lucky winner of his Inspiration Essay Contest, for which Atlanta-based high-schoolers submitted 300 words on their personal source of inspiration.

Evanescence singer **AMY LEE** has accused former bandmate Ben Moody of plagiarizing on their 2003 album, *Fallen*. During promotion for *The Open Door*, the band's new record, she said of Moody, "We just needed a guitar player who could make his own guitar riffs instead of ripping everyone else's off."

American Idol winner **RUBEN STUDDARD** has opened a modeling agency in his native Alabama in an attempt to get more full-figured women into the media, particularly into music videos. "Girls down there don't get a lot of opportunity," Studdard says.

WORD!



"I GOT DEPRESSED OVER A GUY, AND I ATE ANGRY MENSTRUAL ICE CREAM."

COURTNEY LOVE ON HER RECENT WEIGHT GAIN

Mandy Moore perfects the cold shoulder.



IN THE STUDIO

"A LITTLE SAD"

RECOVERING TEEN-POPPER **MANDY MOORE** DEALS WITH HEARTBREAK BY GETTING MELLOW, BAKING COOKIES

✚ MANDY MOORE IS in a bit of a funk. In the past few years, the bubbly Hollywood sweetheart has suffered two very public break-ups—first with tennis heartthrob Andy Roddick, then with *Scrubs* star Zach Braff. Now, she's seeking solace in her music.

"It's been a cathartic, therapeutic exercise for me," Moore, 22, says of making her first album in almost four years. "A lot of it comes from being hurt. I'm at this point in my life where I'm thinking about who I am in a way that I haven't before." Oh, no, a quarter-life crisis? "Exactly," Moore giggles. "The songs are a little sad, a little downbeat—not quite so shiny and happy."

A former bubblegum princess who used to open for the Backstreet Boys, Moore has retreated to a rustic outpost in the Catskill Mountains and invited gentle singer-songwriter types like Rachael Yamagata and L.A. duo the Weepies to help her write. "I guess at my heart I'm sort of a folkie," she says. "I've been taking

long drives by myself, obsessively listening to Joni Mitchell's *Court and Spark*. I want this record to have a really organic, fresh sound."

The part-time movie star is also loving the solitude, and she spends her downtime baking cookies, picking apples and posting bear sightings on her MySpace blog. "I feel cut off from the world up here," she says, "but in a good way. There's no phone reception, someone cooks us yummy meals, we have cozy quarters—it's like adult camp." Moore lets out a wistful sigh. "I don't want to leave." *Josh Eells*

ALL ABOUT MY RECORD

ARTIST: Mandy Moore

PRODUCER: John Alagia

STUDIO: Allaire Studios, Shokan, New York

LAST ALBUM: *Coverage*, 2003

NEW ALBUM: As yet untitled, due April

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

Canadian chanteuse **FEIST** has rented a chateau near Paris to record her third album, the follow-up to 2004's *Let It Die*, with producers Chilly Gonzales and Renaud Letang.

Austin indie quartet **SPOON** are back in their hometown at work on *Stroke Their Brains*, their sixth full-length studio album, due out this spring.



Joy Division-loving **INTERPOL** are in Manhattan recording the follow-up to 2004's *Antics*. This will be their major-label debut, following their signing to Capitol Records.

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SANYO

OBITS

AHMET ERTEGUN (1923–2006)

Atlantic Records founder and music legend dies in New York after a backstage fall

✚ IN THE INDUSTRY, they call them “record men”—lifelong music fanatics with the ears to find the best talent and the shrewdness to channel it into hit songs. And for much of the 20th century, few record men were more successful or admired than Ahmet Ertegun, the cofounder of Atlantic Records, whose signings—from Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin to Led Zeppelin—shaped R&B and rock for decades.

Ertegun died at 83 on December 14. He'd been in a coma since October, after falling backstage at a concert by another of his renowned signings, the Rolling Stones.

The son of a Turkish ambassador to the United States, Ertegun was born in Istanbul but grew up in privilege in Washington, D.C., in the '30s and '40s. An outsider in segregated America, he became obsessed with jazz, sneaking out of the embassy to haunt record stores, clubs and theaters in the black part of town. In



Ertegun with Mick Jagger in Los Angeles in 1973.

Wow, you don't come across too many lions in the city. At least not this far from 64th Street.



I made a daring escape from the zoo this morning.

You're a lion on the lamb.



I'm going to ignore that...I need someone to help me learn the ropes of city life.

1947, he and a record-collector friend, Herb Abramson, started Atlantic with a \$10,000 loan from Ertegun's dentist.

With releases by Charles, Ruth Brown and the Drifters, Ertegun, along with producer Jerry Wexler and engineer Tom Dowd, labored to streamline the rough edges of rhythm & blues to create a slick, urban sound. They nailed it in 1954 with Big Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle and Roll," and when it was covered by a white singer from Michigan named Bill Haley, the song sold a million copies and rock was effectively born. In the '60s, as other independent labels were struggling to remain relevant or dying off entirely, Atlantic expanded, dominating soul with Franklin, Otis Redding and Sam & Dave. Later in the decade, Ertegun made a profitable bet by signing a couple of untested British bands: Cream and Led Zeppelin.

Meanwhile, Ertegun and his brother, Nesuhi, were also transforming their first love, jazz, with some of the most ambitious artists the field has ever had: John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, Charles Mingus and the Modern Jazz Quartet.

As the son of a diplomat, Ertegun was expected to return to Turkey and go into public service, but he was born to be a record man. "I'm an American by choice," he once said. "I love American music." *Ben Sisario*



With French singer Michel Polnareff in 1975.



At a Halloween gala with long-lost twin, Kid Rock.

OBITS

MARISKA VERES

59, December 2, in the Hague, of cancer. Lead singer of the Dutch pop group Shocking Blue, whose 1970 hit "Venus" was later covered by Bananarama.

RUTH BROWN

78, November 17, in Las Vegas, of complications from a stroke and heart attack. Fifties R&B star who helped establish Atlantic Records.

ROBERT MCFERRIN SR.

85, November 24, in St. Louis, after a heart attack. The first black male member of the New York Metropolitan Opera and father of Bobby "Don't Worry Be Happy" McFerrin.

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elementandfriends.com



Great. The first thing we need to do is find a drugstore. I need some conditioner or my mane is going to get all frizzy.



20

SONGS YOU SHOULD
DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

1 GWEN STEFANI FEAT. PHARRELL

"YUMMY" INTERSCOPE

The beat is like "Milkshake 2"—sparse and intoxicatingly off-kilter. The lyrics are Gwen at her best—intoxically retarded.

2 BLOC PARTY

"THE PRAYER" VICE

"We Will Rock You" stomps? Gregorian chants? These frantic post-punks are back, gloriously stranger than ever.

3 FALL OUT BOY

"THIS AIN'T A SCENE, IT'S AN ARMS RACE" ISLAND

The emo-punk poster boys stomp and shimmy and create a brand-new hybrid ... emo-funk?

4 YOUNG JEEZY FEAT. TIMBALAND

"3 A.M." DEF JAM

The most no-frills force in hip-hop teams with the genre's wildest beatmaker for a churning, chattering collaboration.

5 CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH

"SATAN SAID DANCE" [CLAPYOURHANDSSAYYEAH.COM]

The Philly/Brooklyn hype magnets deliver their most Talking Heads-inspired groove to date.

7 TIMBALAND FEAT. NELLY FURTADO AND JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

"GIVE IT TO ME" [ONLINE]

Rumored to appear on the forthcoming Timbo solo album, a stuttering superstar-posse cut.

8 PAGODA

"LESSON LEARNED" ECSTATIC PEACE/UNIVERSAL

Actor Michael Pitt gets his art rock on with this lurching lead track from his band's self-titled debut.

9 LIL SCRAPPY

"I'M BACK" REPRISE

For his tough-talking G-Unit-endorsed protégé, Lil Jon whips up some impossibly sleek New Wave.

10 YOUNG PILLIONAIRES FEAT. MISTAH F.A.B.

"HELMET ON MY HEAD" [ONLINE]

Yup, about getting so stupid in the club you have to wear protective headgear. More proof that Bay Area-bred hyphy is the funnest genre on the planet.

11 THE MAGIC NUMBERS

"TAKE A CHANCE" CAPITOL

Airy harmonies and bittersweet riffs from this portly London bro-sis combo.

12 PHAROAE MONCH

"PUSH" SRC

The eternally on-the-rise backpack hero cranks up a vintage soul beat he loves so much that he almost forgets to rap over it.

13 BEACH HOUSE

"SALTWATER" CARPARK

The instruments sound cheap, the singing sounds drugged: a mellow indie-rock charmer through and through.

14 ASHLEY TISDALE

"HE SAID SHE SAID" WARNER BROS.

In which a *High School Musical* grad tosses off her Mouseketeer ears and gets her Pussycat Doll on.

15 CIARA

"I PROCEED" LA FACE

Sweaty, soiled electro from the Neptunes and the R&B star who nails the dirty-android vibe better than anyone else.

16 LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

"GET INNOCUOUS" CAPITOL

The current masters of the dance-punk racket pile polyrhythms atop polyrhythms for one awesomely bizarre disco sex bomb.

17 FANTASIA FEAT. BIG BOI

"HOOD BOY" RCA

The *American Idol* champ says screw the classy stuff, recruits half of OutKast and belts out a brassy, soul-drenched ode to a crush.

18 CRIME MOB

"ROCK YO HIPS" REPRISE

Rowdy ATL crew calls for a boycott on strip clubs and encourages women to do something other than move their asses in a pornographic fashion.

19 MODEST MOUSE

"STEAMING GENIUS" EPIC

The Seattle indie-rock troupe—with new member Johnny Marr—honors a robot messiah with killer riffs.

20 ARCADE FIRE

"INTERVENTION" MERGE

Bono's favorite Canuck rockers return with this new single, packing more scrappy grandeur than ever.

6

SONG OF
THE MONTH

CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG

"THE OPERATION" BECAUSE MUSIC/VICE/ATLANTIC

The daughter of Serge Gainsbourg—venerable French smut bard—hires songwriter Jarvis Cocker—venerable British smut bard—for a sultry jam about boot-knocking and minimally invasive surgery. Rowr!

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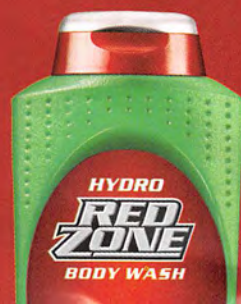


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HAVE A PICTURE OF A TWELVE-INCH-LONG
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Old Spice



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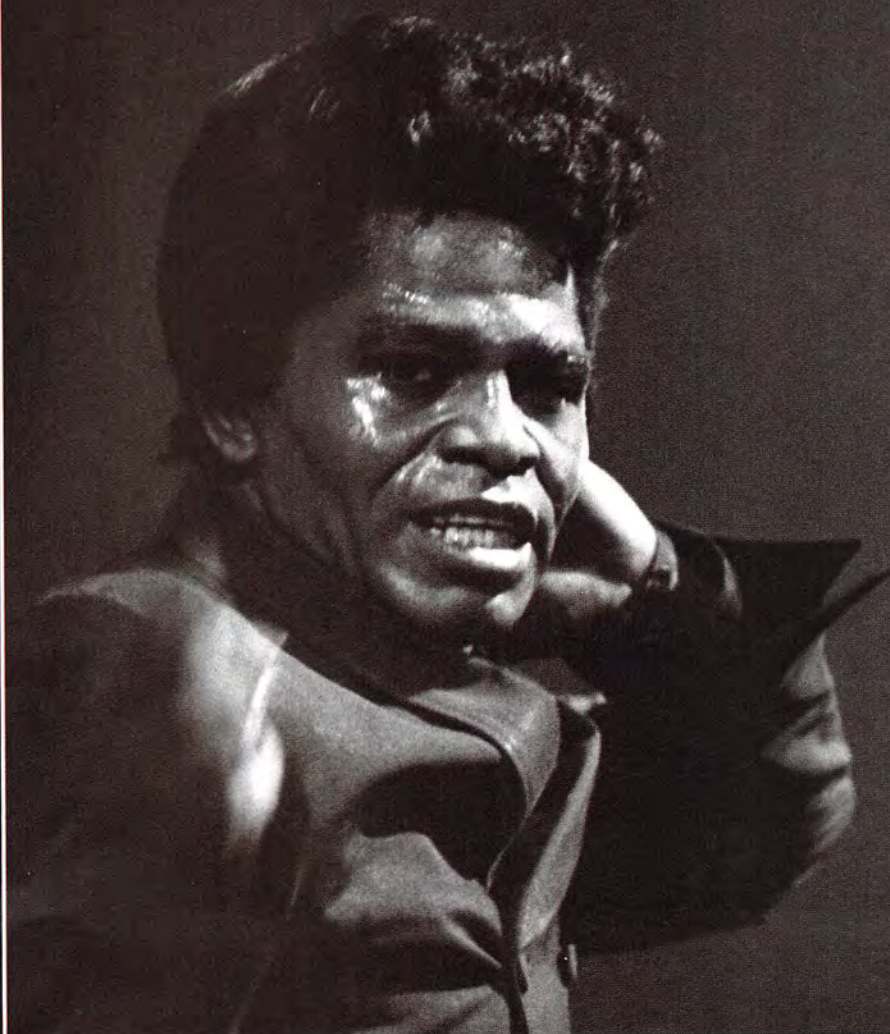


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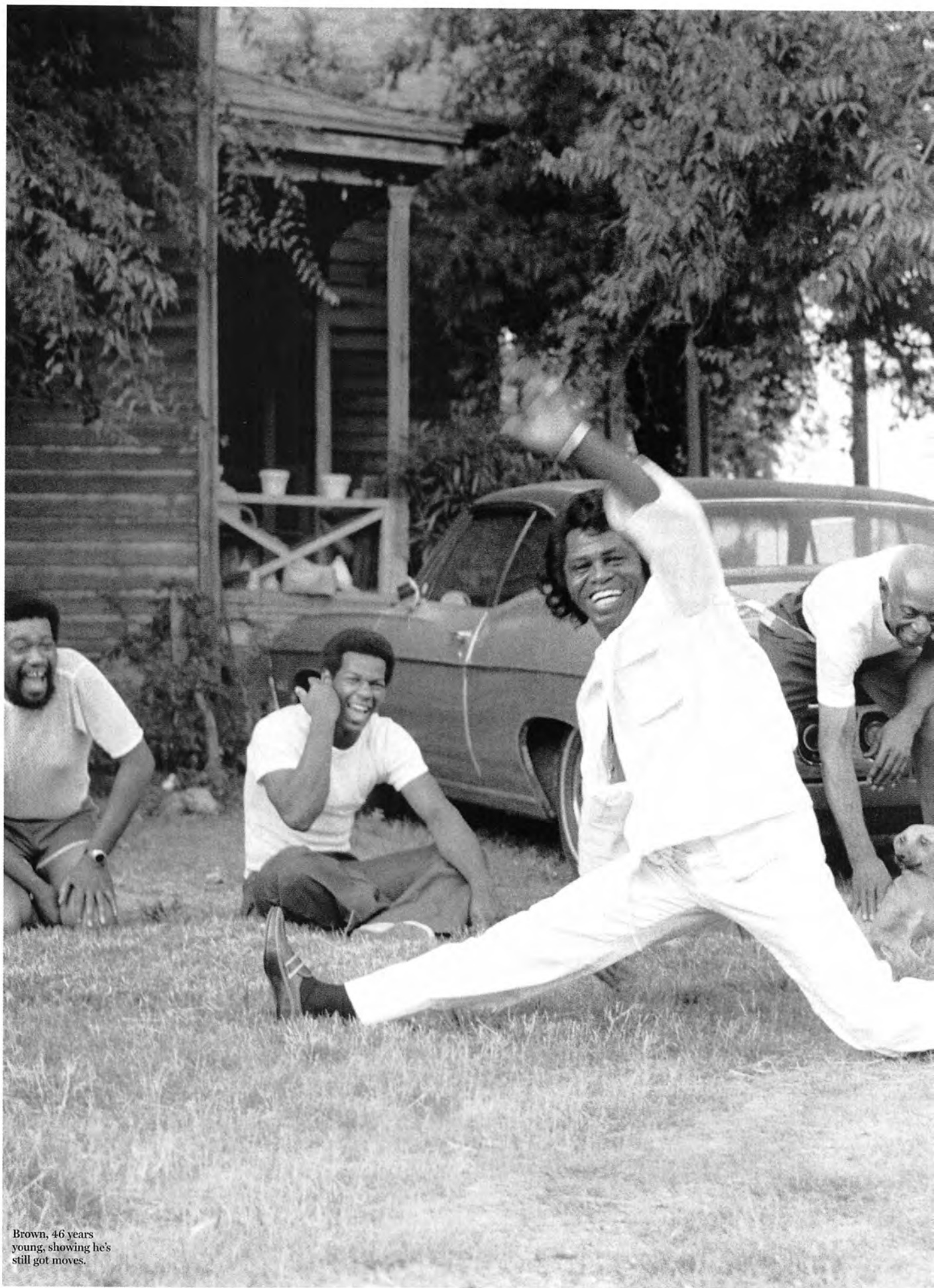
*
(KNOWING STUFF IS GOOD)

JAMES BROWN

THE GODFATHER OF SOUL AND MINISTER OF THE NEW NEW SUPER
HEAVY FUNK, REMEMBERED (P. 48)



James Brown:
On the scene like
a sweat machine.



Brown, 46 years young, showing he's still got moves.

JAMES BROWN

KING JAMES

The drugs and the jail time may have tarnished the legend, but before that, James Brown scored more hits than anyone but Elvis, reconfigured the pulse of R&B—and single-handedly changed the course of pop music



(BY DOUGLAS WOLK)

IT CAN BE hard to hear James Brown through the static of the last quarter-century of his life, when he became a self-parodying caricature: the drugs, the arrests and the jail time, the incoherent interviews, the long, sad trickle of mediocre little records. By the time he died of complications from pneumonia on Christmas Day at the age of 73, his legend had been reduced to a rasping chorus of "I Got You (I Feel Good)," an Eddie Murphy *SNL* skit and a wave of the cape; his last sizeable pop hit was 1985's "Living in America," a bombastic *Rocky* theme song he didn't write or produce. But the first 25 years of his career made him the greatest American pop musician of the 20th century—a man who worked his way up from nothing and almost single-handedly changed the course of music.

James Joe Brown Jr. was born May 3, 1933, in a one-room shack near Barnwell, South Carolina. He formed his first band, the Cremona Trio, at the age of 12. A scrapper from early on, he went to prison in 1949 at age 15 for breaking into cars. Tried as an adult, he was sentenced to 8 to 16 years but served 3. When he got out of prison, he started playing music with a group including his friend Bobby Byrd. Within a few years they had evolved into a vocal group, the Famous Flames, and scored a No. 6 R&B hit with their crude, roaring 1956 debut single, "Please, Please, Please," on which they became *James Brown* and the Famous Flames. From then on, he made sure his name was always the one in lights.

If he'd only ever recorded "Please, Please, Please," he'd still be remembered as one of the hardest screamers in R&B. If he'd called it quits after *Live at the Apollo*—his breakthrough concert album, captured on a freezing-cold New York night in 1962—he'd still have a throne in the pantheon of soul. If his career had ended with the chart-topping '65-'66 triumvirate of "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" (which reconfigured the pulse of black music), "I Got You" (his biggest-ever pop crossover) and "It's a Man's Man's Man's World" (the secular-gospel meltdown that became his vehicle for onstage testifying), he'd still be a legend. And we haven't even gotten to the good stuff yet.

In mid-1967, he dropped the bomb: "Cold Sweat," a two-part single that was ground zero for funk. Before

"Cold Sweat," songs had chord changes and melodies. After "Cold Sweat," they didn't have to anymore—they could get by on rhythm alone. Brown stripped away everything but the beat, turned his voice and all of his band's instruments into percussion, gave drummer Clyde Stubblefield space to stretch out and forced the rest of black American music to scramble to catch up.

Then he made everyone scramble again—roughly every other month for the next seven years' barrage of hits, which were only a fraction of what he was recording. (In 1968 alone, he released half a dozen albums and 13 singles under his own name, produced a bunch of other records and played for American troops in Vietnam.) By 1971, he was writing and producing so much material for members of his hard-touring revue that he set up the People Records label to handle it all. Of course, James Brown's face appeared on the label of every People release. No other musician has ever been as determined to make it big, even when he was already the biggest star in R&B.

Along the way, Brown became the living symbol of African-American financial empowerment—although "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)" might have been written under duress from the Black Panthers. (A political independent if there ever was one, Brown endorsed Nixon in 1972 and spoke fondly of ultra-right-wing Senator Strom Thurmond in 1999.) But "I Don't Want Nobody to Give Me Nothing (Open Up the Door, I'll Get It Myself)," "You Got to Have a Job (If You Don't Work, You Can't Eat)" and "Soul Power" were straight-up manifestos, and he delivered them exactly as passionately as he did Christmas songs, love songs, standards and "I Got Ants in My Pants (And I Want to Dance)."

You can say that he took a lot of credit for what a lot of other people did, and a lot of what makes his best records work is the diamond-sharp performances Brown demanded from his band: the tart chirp of Jimmy Nolen's guitar, the crazily intricate beat-cascades from drummers Clyde Stubblefield and John "Jabo" Starks, the fantastic syncopations of William "Bootsy" Collins's bass, the thrust and weave of Fred Wesley's and Maceo Parker's >>



horns. Did the music really all come from him? "James liked to think he was a drummer," Starks tells *Blender* with a laugh. "And he'd say, 'Don't play it this way, play it thus and so'—and then you'd go ahead and play what you were playing before."

Still, nobody who backed him up in the '60s and '70s ever managed to hit anywhere near the same heights without him, and even lesser musicians found themselves shining on his records.

Brown was devastated by the June 1973 death of his son Teddy in a car accident. He came back in '74 with a pair of slow, vengeful, magnificent singles, "The Payback" and "Papa Don't Take No Mess," and marked Nixon's resignation with one last knock-out punch, "Funky President (People It's Bad)." From then on, though, as awesome as his records sometimes could be—and he still had over 30 chart hits to come—they were usually aftershocks of his past glory, or attempts to ride the new waves of dance music, or maddening misfires.

But by then his touch was all over the rest of pop music. The pulse of the bands that took their cues directly from Brown's late-'60s hits evolved into disco and all the dance music that came after it; Miles Davis's mutation of Brown's funk became the foundation of electric jazz; and samples of Brown's records provided the rhythmic backbone for the first decade of hip-hop. "People should remember how innovative he was," Starks says. "Funk, rap, all that stuff came from James. When you hear a groove, you hear part of James Brown."

Rock listeners tend to look at the past in terms of albums, and Brown was a song guy: He never made a flawless studio album, so his work is best experienced on compilations. And right up to the end, long after his flow of innovations had dried up, he could put on a show like nobody else. He was famously full of himself, high as a kite on his own stardom, and his ego was what drove him to greatness. A JAMES BROWN PRODUCTION THE SOUND OF SUCCESS, his records' labels read in the late '60s. For a few brilliant decades, it was true. [BLENDER]



Brown visits with troops backstage before a concert in Vietnam, 1968.

40 REASONS WHY JAMES BROWN WAS SUPERBAD

From inventing the R&B remix to recording "For Goodness Sakes, Look at Those Cakes." HIT ME!

40 The dramatic introductions that always preceded his appearance onstage: "Soul Brother No. 1! Mr. Dynamite! The star of the show—JAMES BROWN!"

39 "UH!"

38 In the early '60s, he was touring 300 days a year and playing up to five shows a day.

37 "Take it to the bridge!"

36 The Rolling Stones still regret following James Brown in the 1964 concert film *The T.A.M.I. Show*.

35 On March 9, 1970, almost all of Brown's band members quit, but within a few hours he'd replaced them with a group of teenagers. Six weeks later, they recorded "Sex Machine."

34 Ron Lenhoff, who is credited with cowriting "Sex Machine," is the song's recording engineer—Brown called him in the middle of the night and insisted it had to be recorded right at that moment.

33 Brown on the police who charged him with aggravated assault in 1988: "I aggravated them and they assaulted me."

32 Brown speaking from prison during his subsequent three-year incarceration: "If America can stand to have James Brown in prison, James Brown can stand it."

31 He turned down \$3 million to play in apartheid-era South Africa.

30 In 1986, "Living in America" was in the Top 10 the same week JB was one of the first 10 inductees into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—even though, he observed, "I've never been a rock & roll singer."

29 Brown briefly toured as Little Richard, who shared Brown's manager and couldn't play all the dates he was booked for.

28 The cover of 1975's *Sex Machine Today*, with its astonishing naked-lady typeface

27 In 1980, he recorded a duet with the

then-unknown Rev. Al Sharpton, "God Has Smiled on Me."

26 The label of almost every single he released in the '70s incorporates a little photograph of JB—with whatever hairstyle he was sporting at the time.

25 Brown designed all of his way-over-the-top stage outfits himself, including the gigantic GROS—Godfather of Soul—belt buckle he rocked circa 1974.

24 He reunited with his old Famous Flames partner, Bobby Byrd, for the 2002 single "Killing Is Out, School Is In."

23 He went through a Frank Sinatra phase in the late '60s—recording with a jazz trio and a big band, singing "If I Ruled the World" and "September Song" at the International in Las Vegas.

22 After a couple of successful appearances on *Soul Train*, Brown launched and hosted a glitter-loaded mid-'70s dance-party show of his own, *Future Shock*.

21 He recorded a pile of awesome Christmas records, most notably 1968's "Santa Claus Go Straight to the Ghetto."

20 His 1978 disco jam "For Goodness Sakes,



One guy did for a week. See Marc's story at NissanUSA.com



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19 His third wife, Adrienne, who was arrested in 1987 for charges that included a DUI, claimed diplomatic immunity on the grounds that she was married to the "Ambassador of Soul."

17 Around 1970, he briefly flirted with psychedelic rock, collaborating with a bunch of wah-wah-philes called the Grodeck Whipperjenny.

16 The cartoon on the back of 1974's *Hell* album depicted a conversation between two demons: "He's too strong, we can't stop him"; "That's because he's the Godfather."

15 The 1986 memoir *The Godfather of Soul's* fascinating look into Brown's JB-centric worldview. Sample quote: "Hair and teeth. A man got those two things he's got it all."

14 His 1962 hit "Night Train" features Brown himself on drums; it was recorded while regular drummer Nat Kendrick was in the bathroom.

13 He was indeed a sex machine: The way he sings "I just wanna hear you say I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I ..." in "Please, Please, Please" is one of the dirtiest things ever played on the radio.

12 Seventh-grade dropout Brown recorded the 1966 theme song for Senator Hubert Humphrey's "Don't Be a Drop-Out" campaign; it was a No. 4 R&B hit.

II A James Brown Band instrumental called "The Popcorn" became a hit in 1969; sensing a trend, Brown scrapped his forthcoming single, "You Got to Have a Mother for Me," rerecorded it as "Mother Popcorn" and went to No. 1 on the R&B charts. He followed it with at least three more "Popcorn"-themed hits.

IN THE EARLY '70S, BROWN OWNED THREE OF THE FIVE BLACK-OWNED RADIO STATIONS IN AMERICA.

9 In the late '60s, he cofounded the Black and Brown Stamps program—intended as the black community's equivalent of Green Stamps, with a picture of Soul Brother No. 1 on each stamp.

8 James Brown is the most-sampled artist in history; virtually every casual utterance he has committed to vinyl has ended up on somebody else's record.

7 Brown was a master singer who could holler harder than anyone else—or croon as seductively and magisterially as any bedroom-eyed soul man.

6 He invented the R&B remix by following his 1973 cover of the 5 Royales' "Think" with another version—using exactly the same backing track and hitting the charts both times.

5 His band could come up with hits almost unconsciously. Brown's 1971 No. 6 R&B song "Escape-Ism" isn't actually a composition; it's a three-minute snippet of his band jamming.

4 Between 1956's "Please, Please, Please" and 1993's "Can't Get Any Harder," he hit the R&B charts an astounding 119 times—including 17 No. 1s and 59 Top 10 hits. Even on the pop charts, he appeared 94 times, more than anyone besides Elvis.

3 On April 5, 1968, the day after Martin Luther

King Jr. was assassinated, Brown performed live on Boston television to convince his fans to stay home instead of going out and rioting. It worked—and the performance was incredible.

2 Brown was a phenomenal showman. In the legendary routine that accompanied almost every performance of "Please, Please, Please" for half a century, he'd fake a heart attack and collapse, and emcee Danny Ray would come out to cover him with a cape; Brown would start shuffling off, toss aside the cape, grab the mic, start howling again—and then repeat the entire process a few times. He danced so hard onstage that he lost several pounds a show, and he often had an IV drip waiting backstage to rehydrate him.

His 1963 album *Live at the Apollo* is one of the most spellbinding records ever made. It's a perfect storm of performer, audience and atmosphere, recorded in New York's Harlem during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Brown recorded three more live albums at the Apollo. Finally, after his death, the stage of the theater was the place his body lay in state. *D.W.*



The Caped Crusader Brown during one of his infamous fake exits.

from the director of *hustle & flow*

BLACK SNAKE

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(By David Peisner)

DAVID ALLAN COE

EX-CON FOUND LIVING IN CAVE!

> David Allan Coe was the outlaw even outlaws were leery of. He spent 20 years in prison for offenses including armed robbery, and claimed to have killed a man who threatened him with sexual assault in a prison shower. When a reporter challenged this story, Coe wrote "I'd Like to Kick the Shit Out of You" in his honor. In the '70s, Coe recorded two albums of X-rated and racist tunes, with titles like "Cum Stains on My Pillow" and "N*gger Fuckers." Money troubles followed. He lived in a cave in Tennessee after the IRS seized his home in the '80s, and in 1990, Feds stormed a stage to repossess a guitar right out of Coe's hands. He recently recorded with members of Pantera and toured with Kid Rock.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "It's hurt my career, because I'm not a pussy and a yes-man. Nevertheless, I'm the motherfucker who has to live with David Allan Coe the rest of his life."



Wow! Slash looks awful.

KEITH URBAN

MR. KIDMAN POSES FOR PLAYGIRL!

> Urban's recent jaunt to Betty Ford shocked those who knew him only as Nicole Kidman's hunky husband of almost a year, but his closet has skeletons aplenty. When his career stalled in the '90s, a coke habit reduced him to scouring the floor of a Nashville drug den for crack. After getting clean, Urban posed seminude for *Playgirl*.

According to the *Daily Mail*, rehab beckoned again in 2002. Then in June 2006, he married Kidman—to the surprise of his former longtime girlfriend, who reportedly described him as a drunk, drug addict and womanizer. According to some reports, his latest rehab is a condition of a prenup he signed at the insistence of Kidman's drug-demonizing ex, Tom Cruise.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "I hate the straight road. I find it very monotonous and boring."



TRACY LAWRENCE

CHEERLEADER BATTERED!



> Just before releasing a 1991 debut that would spawn four Top 10 singles, Tracy Lawrence was shot four times during a mugging. Three years later, some teenagers gave the star the finger while he was driving; he followed them home and fired his .357 Magnum in the air to scare them, precipitating a \$4.2 million civil suit. In March 1997, things began looking up: Lawrence married a former Dallas Cowboys cheerleader. But by September, they'd separated, and by December, she'd filed charges against him for allegedly throwing her into a wall, punching and threatening to kill her; his ex-wife's father later sued him to recover the cost of the wedding, calling it a publicity stunt. Lawrence was eventually convicted of battery and suspended by his record label until he got "his personal matters straight."

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "I made some bad decisions. It just snowballed and one stupid act led to another."



Tracy Lawrence enjoys a reflective moment.

SARA EVANS

STAR LEAVES PORN POL!

> Multiplatinum singer Sara Evans appeared to be living a rags-to-riches fairy tale until she cut her 2006 *Dancing With the Stars* appearance short to file for divorce. Her official complaint alleged that her husband, former Republican congressional candidate Craig Schelske, kept a stash of porn that included pictures of himself having sex with other women, used Craigslist to solicit threesomes and anal sex, looted the family's "church tithing" account of \$66,500, and had an affair with the nanny. Schelske, in turn, accused Evans of adulterous affairs with, among others, Kenny Chesney.

IN HER OWN WORDS: "I'm in shock."



Litigating with the stars.

GEORGE JONES

"POSSUM" GOES TO FUNNY FARM!

> George Jones's endless string of country hits made him a star, but his wanton misbehavior made him a legend. At 20, he got stabbed in the belly after jumping the repo man who'd come for his car. His renowned boozing through the '60s and '70s led frequently to gunplay, fisticuffs and enough missed concerts to earn him the sobriquet "No Show" Jones. After his tumultuous six-year marriage to Tammy Wynette ended in 1975, "the Possum" added coke to his repertoire. By the decade's end, he'd been accused of punching his fiancée in the face and trying to shoot his best friend; he was eventually committed to a mental hospital. After starring in a televised police chase in the early '80s, he finally sobered up—but tumbled off the wagon in 1999, drunkenly wrecking his SUV and puncturing a lung. Surprisingly he lived and recently cut an album with fellow survivor Merle Haggard.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "If it appeals to the most lowdown kind of human behavior, you name it and I've done it."



"Mr. Jones, we find you guilty... of having awesome hair!"

TY HERNDON

METH MAN FLASHES COP!

> In May 1995, Ty Herndon's debut single went to the top of the country charts. About a month later, he was on his way to play a Texas Police convention when he made a stop in a nearby park, allegedly exposed himself to a man and asked him, "What are you into?" Unfortunately for Herndon, the man was into being an undercover cop conducting a sex-sting operation. When Herndon was searched, the officer found crystal meth in his billfold; he was sentenced to community service and a \$1,000 fine. Rehab followed but didn't really take: Herndon scored several more big hits in the late '90s, but after he ditched Nashville for Hollywood, his career bottomed out and he reacquainted himself with his old friend crystal meth. In 2004, he was coaxed back into rehab by his friends and relatives.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "When you start digging up your own truths and find out what's going on—that you're a self-centered, selfish [expletive]—it's really hard to take a look at that."



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JOHNNY PAYCHECK

ACCUSED RAPIST IN SKY-HIGH BRAWL!



> The future Johnny Paycheck ditched home at 15 and later joined the Navy, where the five-foot-five menace got two years in the brig for nearly crushing the skull of a superior officer in a fistfight. In 1958, he made his way to Nashville, where he became a player in country's burgeoning outlaw movement—and an incorrigible drunk. The '70s brought not only Paycheck's biggest hit ("Take This Job and Shove It") but also a paternity suit, bankruptcy and a prison sentence for check forgery. A scuffle aboard a Frontier Airlines plane in 1982 resulted in a \$175,000 civil judgment against him. The year before, he was accused of raping a 12-year-old girl and pleaded no contest to a lesser charge; in 1985, he shot a man in a bar brawl and was locked up for two years. He died in 2003 at 64.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "The hardships that I put on my family—all of this was due to one thing only: my stupidity."



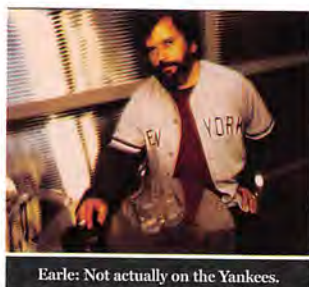
Paycheck takes razor, shoves it.

STEVE EARLE

CRACKHEAD MARRIES SEVEN TIMES!

> After his 1986 *Guitar Town* topped the charts, Steve Earle began taking as much crack, smack and Dilaudid as he could afford. At the end of the '80s, he picked up two assault charges and quit music to hang around South Nashville crack houses. In July 1994, he was released on bond after a drug bust but later that day was caught smoking crack and was arrested again—"still in the fucking tie I'd been wearing in court," he said. After four months in prison, he finally got clean; he recently married—for the seventh time.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "However bad anyone thinks it was, the truth is worse."



Earle: Not actually on the Yankees.



Haggard's bartending gig was short-lived.

MERLE HAGGARD

HOBOS HOSTS A 10-YEAR PARTY!

> Merle Haggard grew up in an abandoned railroad boxcar and spent years in and out of juvenile detention. Right before he turned 21, he hatched a plan to rob a local restaurant after-hours but got so drunk he tried breaking in while it was still open. When they arrested him, the cops found a stolen check-printing machine in Hag's car. He was jailed, promptly escaped and was recaptured and shipped to San Quentin. He made the most of his time there, brewing his own beer and running a gambling racket from his cell. Released after three years, he made a fortune in country music in the '80s, then blew it all on bad investments, expensive divorces and a decade-long party on his Lake Shasta, California, houseboat. Haggard righted his ship in the '90s and has recently assumed an unlikely respectability in his old age.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "You start with a truancy problem and they send you to jail with big-time criminals. Soon, your idols become Jesse James and John Dillinger."

SPADE COOLEY

SEX-CULT WIFE MURDERED!

> Now almost forgotten, in the '40s Spade Cooley was known as the King of Western Swing. But Cooley was also a heavy drinker with a jealous streak and an appalling temper; he once tried to toss a female vocalist off the Santa Monica pier because she had quit his band. In 1961, convinced that his wife, Ella Mae, had joined a sex cult and had an affair with Roy Rogers, he attacked her in their home. He beat her, choked her and burned her with cigarettes in front of their 14-year-old daughter. Ella Mae was dead upon arrival at the hospital. Convicted of murder, Cooley was granted a three-day prison furlough in 1969 to play a benefit concert. After performing, he strode offstage and died of a heart attack.

IN HIS OWN WORDS: "Rockets ran through my brain when Ella Mae told me of her desire to join a free-love cult. I must have hurt her terrible."

MINDY MCCREADY

DRUNK DRIVER BOTCHES SUICIDE! TWICE!

> Mindy McCready's 1996 debut sold 2 million copies. But after that, her life slowly declined: She was arrested for buying OxyContin with a fake prescription in August 2004, and again in May 2005 for a suspected DUI.

Then her ex-boyfriend Billy McKnight—who'd twice before sent McCready to the ER—reportedly broke down her bedroom door and choked her nearly to death. McKnight was locked up, and McCready lit out for Arizona with a con man and later was charged in a scheme to help him obtain two luxury boats. She reconciled with McKnight but, after discovering she was pregnant with his baby, made two suicide attempts in three months. She gave birth in March 2006; McKnight is now disputing his paternity.

IN HER OWN WORDS: "I feel embarrassed about the decisions I've made."



HAGGARD: ROGER ROSSMEYER/CORBIS; EARLE: ZUMA PRESS; COOLEY: SPLASH NEWS/NEWS.COM; MCCREADY: SPLASH NEWS/NEWS.COM

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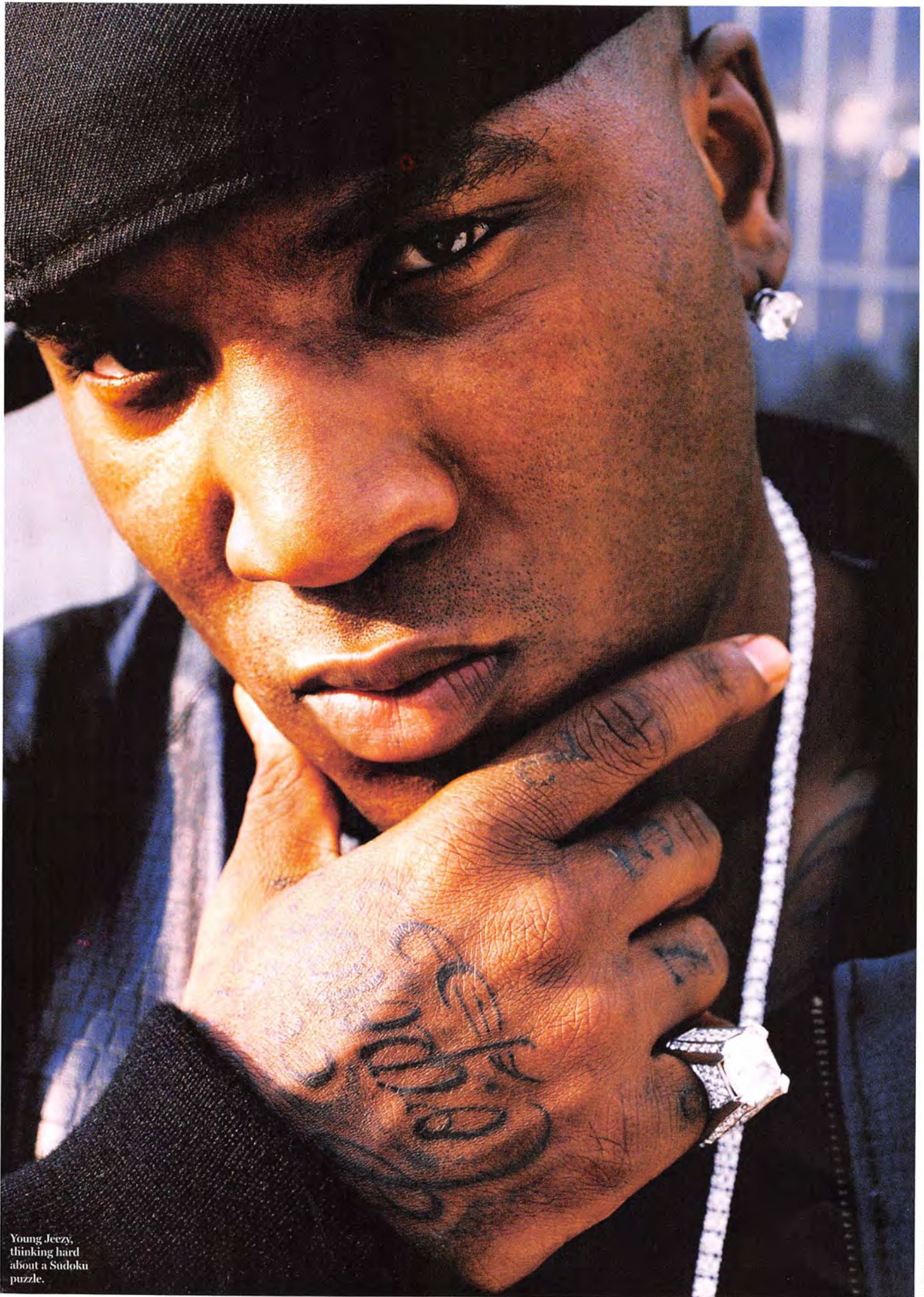

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Young Jeezy,
thinking hard
about a Sudoku
puzzle.

JONATHAN MANNION



THE CRACK-SLANGING ATLANTA MC TAKES A BREAK FROM MAKING IT SNOW TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT SNITCHING, THE AFTERLIFE AND, OF COURSE, SLANGING CRACK. AYYYYY ...

(By Josh Eells)

IT'S A COLD, dreary night on Manhattan's West Side, and the weather just took a turn for the worse. Sheets of rain have been pouring down all day; now a security guard ducks his dripping head into Sony Music Studios with an update. "I think," he says, "it just started snowing."

He's mistaken, as it turns out. But the forecast is oddly appropriate—because who has just arrived but the Snowman himself, raspy Atlanta rapper Young Jeezy. A reformed cocaine peddler who started dealing at age 13, the former Jay Jenkins conquered the ATL mix-tape circuit before breaking big with 2005's *Let's Get It: Thug Motivation 101*—a crack-rap epic that did more for snow than the Colorado Tourism Board.

Jeezy plops down on a hallway couch, dressed in head-to-toe black and rocking enough diamond-encrusted trinkets to keep De Beers afloat for a year. "Right now I'm wearing ...

oh, about seven or eight," he estimates. (That would be *hundred thousand*.) As he nibbles on a plate of barbecued shrimp, we remark that the formerly Frosty-shaped MC has slimmed down considerably. "I'm naturally skinny," he says. "When I was 18, I probably weighed, like, 90-something pounds. But then I started getting money, eating and drinking a lot, and I just got lazy. Now I'm back in shape—I'll do sit-ups, maybe a couple sets of pull-ups, then throw the iPod on and run six or seven miles on the treadmill. And I eat Special K and shit like that."

He'll need that strength in the coming weeks as he promotes his new album, *The Inspiration*. But first, your questions. We ask Jeezy if, as a true man of the people, he's looking forward to answering them. "Oh, no doubt," he wheezes. "I love my fans." Let's hope he feels the same way in an hour ... ➤



MY SCHOOL CONFISCATED MY SNOWMAN T-SHIRT. WILL YOU SEND ME ANOTHER ONE?

devero17, Boulder, CO

Of course! That's crazy they would do that. I think they started banning them because it was some hood shit that got over into middle-class America. There's so many other things going on in the world that are so much more important. People are dying every day. Like, a shirt, man? You gotta be kidding me.

IF YOU COULD HAVE ANY SUPERPOWER, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Marlostian, Chevy Chase, MD

I'd walk through walls, like the Invisible Man. I'd walk into a bank, get me some money and walk right back out. I wouldn't be a superhero, I'd be a supervillain.

I HEARD ESKIMOS HAVE OVER 100 WORDS FOR SNOW. HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE?

Ghendral101, Corona del Mar, CA

Let's see: There's *white, soft, powder, jams, pies, girl*. But nobody really says any of that anymore. Those are jail words. You don't want to go to jail, homey.

IS THERE ANY SITUATION WHERE SNITCHING IS OK?

mr.plan1989, Knoxville, TN

Never. I know it sounds bad, but it's the rules of the game, man. I've seen niggas jailed for situations where they manned up and kept quiet, and 9 times out of 10, it comes out better that way. Even if somebody killed my grandma, I'd just deal with that shit on my own—I'm gonna get his grandma, his mama and her daughter. Martial law, baby.

YOU HAVE A 10-YEAR-OLD SON. ARE YOU A GOOD DAD?

drypreslo2, Jericho, VT

I would say so. He stays with his mom in south Georgia, but he comes to Atlanta all the time. He's doing good right now—straight-A student. I spoil him, too: go-cart, motorcycle, dirt bike, four-wheeler, all that. I'd love to go to his football games and stuff, but I don't want to take away from what he's doing.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENS AFTER YOU DIE?

TTandMe, San Antonio

I don't know, man. I smoke *all* the time and try to figure that out. I believe in heaven to a certain extent, but think about animals and the food chain: They have to kill each other to live. Same with us. If we get into a confrontation where it's me or you, then it's gotta be you, 'cause I ain't about to die. So who goes to heaven?

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF A ROLE MODEL?

StnnrShadz, Wallace, NC

Um ... yes and no. I'd say yes, because I tell it like it is and I don't sugarcoat it. But



no, because the issues that I deal with are serious. To a child with no knowledge of the streets, it might blow your mind. If you don't gotta see that, then I say don't see it.

WHAT'S THE NICEST THING YOU'VE EVER DONE FOR A GIRL?

jnthan39, Millbrook, NY

It was her birthday, and I jumped into a private jet and flew out to Cali to surprise her. It was really last-minute. I took her a little gift, too—she likes shiny things.

DID YOU MAKE MORE MONEY FROM SELLING DRUGS OR FROM RAPPING?

BigKilman, Newark, DE

Rapping. In the streets you get money, but you can't really spend it. You can buy watches and chains and cars, but the cars ain't gonna be in your name. Your house ain't gonna be in your name. Ain't none of that shit yours. If

you get fucked-up tomorrow, somebody else is going to capitalize. And before you know it, you're back where you started.

I KNOW YOU WANT TO START ACTING. WHAT'S YOUR DREAM HOLLYWOOD ROLE?

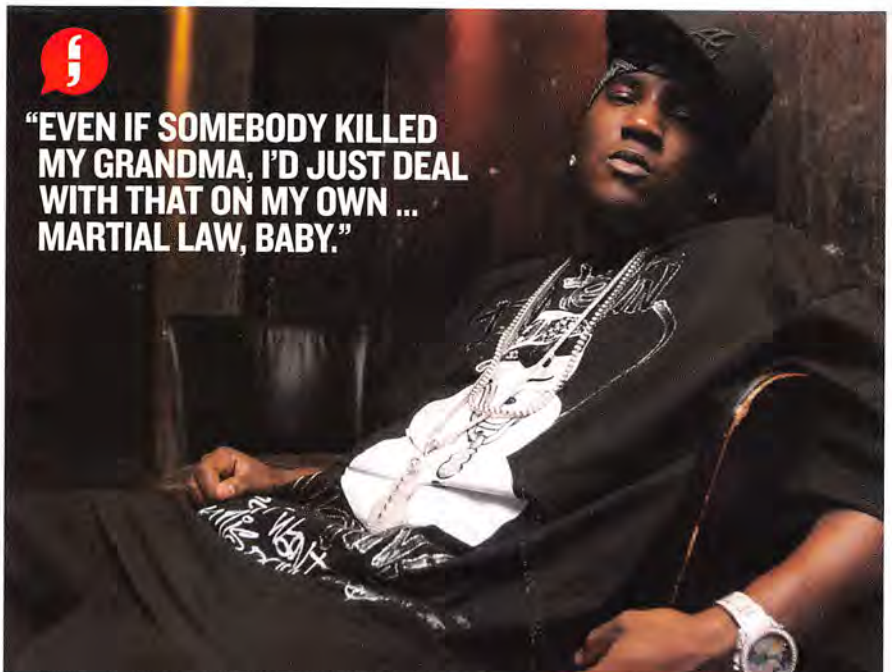
janestit1, Clarinda, LA

The only nigga I ever saw keep a rap career at the movies was Tupac. You see some cats in movies and it ain't really them. But you see Pac in that *Juice* role and it's like, "Damn. Nobody else could have played that part." I'd love to do something like that.

WHEN'S THE LAST TIME YOU THREW A PUNCH?

numunny, Macon, GA

Aw, man. Probably last week. It was just some club bullshit, some wilding. I seen one of my mans arguing, and before we could get the shit under control there was a lot of tongue wrestling going on. So ➤





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I just, you know ... put the smash down. But it don't happen often. You can't fight over everything—you'll get lawsuits left and right.

PRETEND GEORGE W. BUSH JUST NAMED YOU SECRETARY OF DEFENSE. WHAT'S YOUR IRAQ POLICY?

ihartemo65, Mobile, AL

Bush is a motherfucking gangsta. But when you go to war, you go to *war*—you can't just half-ass it and send a couple of troops. Soldiers going back and forth, three casualties one day and none for a month, it makes you think: What the fuck are they doing over there? Niggas ain't got no business over there, really. But, you know. I'm down with America either way.

WHAT'S THE COOLEST TOY YOU HAD AS A KID?

wcczygrox, Anchorage, AK

I really didn't have a lot of toys. I got a Nintendo once, but that shit got stolen. A crackhead relative took it. I got it for Christmas, and then two weeks later he stole it out of my room and pawned it.

WHAT MUSIC DO YOU LOVE THAT WOULD SURPRISE PEOPLE?

Solomced06, New York

I really like Phil Collins. That song "In the Air Tonight"? That's my shit. It's like my music—it builds and it breaks, it's got that

aura. Our life is so on the edge sometimes, so fucked up—shit like that can take you away to another world.

WHERE DID YOU GET THE NAME YOUNG JEEZY? WAS THERE AN OLD JEEZY?

tony.leung, Calabasas, CA

Ha! I wish there was. I was always running with older cats, and they'd call me young'un, youngster. The Jeezy just came from my raspy-ass voice. When I first started rapping, I tried calling myself Lil J, but it just wasn't me. I'm Jeezy.

WERE YOU A GOOD STUDENT GROWING UP?

blap71, Jeromesville, OH

I did all right. I was smart and shit—good at math, science. But I didn't have the time and patience to deal with stuff. I started getting in trouble, getting in the streets and getting money, and I was like, What the fuck am I going to school for? You look around and you're surrounded by 50 motherfuckers, and ain't nobody graduated from school—but everybody's getting money.

ARE YOU CARRYING A GUN RIGHT NOW?

gdup4lyfe, Miami

No—but somebody with me is. I probably would be anywhere else, but this is New York. Y'all ain't playing, with your hip-hop cops and all. But normally—shit, yeah. If I

got some pants on, I'm strapped. I'm trying to get back home to see my little man.

WHAT CELEBRITIES DO YOU HAVE ON YOUR SPEED DIAL?

ment2blo, Boca Raton, FL

Speed dial? I don't even know how to work that shit. But I've got pretty much everybody in my phone. Hov, Snoop, LeBron, D-Wade, Carmelo, Mike Vick—cats like that.

HOW DO SONGS GET LEAKED OVER THE INTERNET?

dangerfeel, Park City, UT

It's usually people who are close to the music, like engineers. That's how my first album leaked—I just wasn't careful. We were so used to doing music and leaving it sitting around the studio. It's cool, though. You just gotta break their motherfucking fingers. I had to settle out of a lawsuit for that.

BACK IN THE DAY, DID YOU EVER GET HIGH ON YOUR OWN SUPPLY?

yruwack, Keno, OR

Hell no. I smoke every now and then, to keep me mellow—sometimes you just gotta get away. But when I was in the streets, I didn't fuck with nothing. I thought about it—but how's it gonna look if you're the boss and you're fucking around like Tony Montana, all types of shit up your nose?



Your homeboys ain't respecting that.

WHAT DID YOUR PARENTS DO FOR A LIVING?

Sachoo, Gary, IN

My mom did a little hair, but that's it. I mostly stayed with my grandma. She was my heart—the only person I could really talk to. When she passed, that just fucked everything up. I was gung-ho then.

DO YOU HAVE ANY RECURRING DREAMS?

spudt82, Chicago

I have this one where I'm falling. I don't know if it's from an airplane or a cliff or what. I wake up right before I hit the ground. They say I jump a lot in my sleep—bad karma or bad memories, I guess. I've never tried to find out what it means. Sometimes you don't want to know why shit happens. You just hope it don't happen again.

WHAT'S THE DUMBEST THING YOU EVER BOUGHT?

nick_hf, Charlotte, NC

A \$100,000 chain. I really didn't have to have it. You get a new piece, wear it out a couple of times, then forget it somewhere.

WHAT'S THE BEST ADVICE ANYONE EVER GAVE YOU?

gregsc4, Hunt Valley, MD

One of my old homies used to say, "Don't spend your money on bullshit." And look what I go do. [BLENDER]



Young Jeezy (left) and Ludacris skip battle rhymes, go straight to thumb war.



"I REALLY LIKE PHIL COLLINS. 'IN THE AIR TONIGHT' IS LIKE MY MUSIC—IT BUILDS AND IT BREAKS, IT'S GOT THAT AURA."

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GARY NUMAN

"Cars"

WHEN TWO TOUGHS TRIED TO DRAG SYNTH-POP'S KING ANDROID FROM HIS CAR AND GIVE HIM A BEATDOWN, IT INSPIRED AN ELECTRO CLASSIC OF VEHICULAR ALIENATION (By Andrew Harrison)

> THE AUTOMOBILE TYPICALLY serves a handful of well-worn purposes in rock & roll. If you're not enjoying fun, fun, fun till Daddy takes the T-Bird away, you're either coveting an Escalade or a Mercedes-Benz, drooling over some gleaming piece of greased lightning, exploring paradise by the dashboard light or dying young and gloriously round Dead Man's Curve. What you're definitely *not* doing is covering in the driver's seat, doors locked and windows rolled up, hiding from the terrors of the outside world in your own private survival capsule.

But that's what happens in Gary Numan's "Cars," the bizarre, ice-cold worldwide hit that ushered in the robo-pop of the Reagan years. Englishman Numan—born Gary Anthony James Webb—took all the automobile's connotations of sex and freedom and flipped them until the car represented fear and

victimization: a mobile gated community. He fathered the electro-geek and—eyelinered and affectless in the song's none-more-android video—the electro-goth. For junior 'droids who would grow up to be Moby, Trent Reznor, Marilyn Manson and Depeche Mode, this *was* the future. And Numan spread all these ideas without really knowing it. The inspiration for "Cars" came from an ugly incident when the 21-year-old Numan almost fell victim to road rage.

"I was driving around in London and somehow I managed to upset these two guys in a van," he tells *Blender*. "I don't know why. This was years before dyed hair was common, so maybe they just didn't like the look of me. They stopped the van, got out and started kicking my car, banging the windows, trying to get me out and

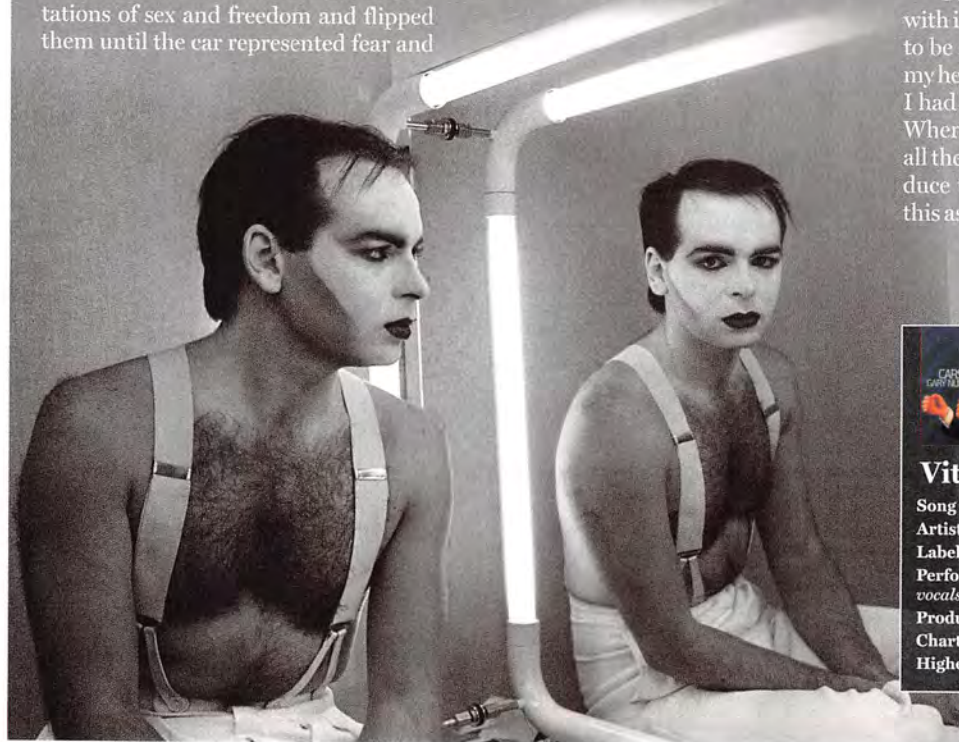
give me a good old hammering. So I locked all my doors and drove up onto the pavement, scattering pedestrians. The lyric is literally that story—how the car felt like a little tank for civilians, a place of safety."

What took this story of technology and unreasoning violence into the Top 10 was its monster riff, an unremitting six-note pile driver. "Ironically," Numan says, "I wrote it on a bass guitar. I'd bought one so I could learn to play it better, and the 'Cars' riff was literally the first thing I played on it. The whole song took probably 10 minutes to write from beginning to end."

"Cars" became Numan's only substantial U.S. hit, and he toured America as the robotic harbinger of electronic music. In some towns, crowds went wild for his show, but just a hundred miles away, entire cities refused to book him at all. "The stance was: This isn't proper music, and we're not going to play it," he says. "But it was really exciting to divide people like that. Being No. 1 is great, but being influential is better."

Numan's clammy android persona wasn't mere performance: "Some of it was contrived," he says. "But later, I discovered I've got Asperger's syndrome." A mild form of autism, Asperger's manifests itself in difficulties communicating and interacting socially. A sufferer might, for instance, want to lock himself away from the world and hide in his car.

"I developed the persona partly to cope with it," Numan says. "I needed to pretend to be a pop star or a frontman because in my heart, I wasn't. I didn't know how to be. I had to be mechanical about everything. When I was due to go on TV, I'd practice all the moves in front of a mirror, to reproduce them exactly. I was as unnatural at this as you could possibly be." [SIDER]



Vital Statistics

Song "Cars"

Artist Gary Numan

Label Beggars Banquet

Performers Gary Numan, *Minimoog*, *Polymoog*, vocals; Paul Gardiner, bass; Cedric Sharpley, drums

Producer Gary Numan

Chart debut February 16, 1980

Highest chart position 9



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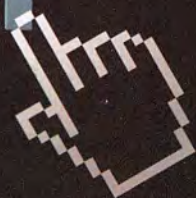
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INSIDER

I heard Prince has a cameo in the movie *Fargo*—as a dead guy. True?

Ethan Gagosian, Chicago

Nope, that's just a myth—but an understandable one. The confusion over the 1996 film, a black comedy about a series of murders in North Dakota, comes from the closing credits. The actor who played one of the murder victims is billed using an unpronounceable symbol—one that looks an awful lot like that of The Artist Formerly Known as Prince. (Or rather, The Artist Formerly Known as The Artist Formerly Known as Prince.)

But it's all just a joke. The "role" was played by a guy named J. Todd Anderson, who was a storyboard artist on the film. He asked the filmmakers (the fabulous Coen brothers) if he could use a symbol instead of his name, and the inveterate jokesters agreed. The squiggle, which looks something like O{+>, is in fact the same as Prince's, only laid on its side (because it's dead, get it?) with a smiley face drawn in. It's actually quite clever, dontcha know.

I keep hearing about all these hip-hop dudes being accused of money laundering. What is that, exactly?

Sean Day, Poughkeepsie, NY

We'll spare you the jokes about washing machines and sudsy C-notes. Put simply, money laundering is the act of funneling illicit income into legitimate business enterprises to give the appearance that it was earned legally. In other words, making dirty money clean (thus, *laundering*). Common methods of money laundering include establishing sham businesses, also known as "shell corporations," and channeling funds through front companies whose cash intake can't easily be monitored (e.g., restaurants and casinos).

As you mention, several prominent rap figures have been connected to money laundering recently. In 2005, Irv Gotti—head of hip-hop label The Inc.—and his brother Christopher were tried and acquitted on charges of laundering more than \$1 million for the Queens drug kingpin Kenneth "Supreme" McGriff. Then, last June, famed bling merchant Jacob "the Jeweler" Arabo was charged with laundering millions of dollars for the Black Mafia Family, a notorious drug-trafficking ring. (The BMF also, somewhat ingeniously, used winning lottery tickets to disguise their profits.) And in November, a business associate of rapper the Game was arrested in Atlantic City and accused of laundering

Was **ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER really in a Guns N' Roses video?**

Lori Hermann, Lexington, Kentucky



Ja! It was the video for "You Could Be Mine," featured on 1991's *Use Your Illusion II*. That year, the song was chosen to appear in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, reportedly by Ah-muld himself, who was a fan of the band.

The video—which is easily YouTube-able, by the way—shows Schwarzenegger in character as the Terminator, complete with leather jacket and shades, wading through the crowd at a GN'R show. Apparently, the band is his next target. He stalks them silently while Axl and Co. rock out, before eventually surprising them in the alley as they exit the arena. Shotgun in hand, the future Governor looks each member up and down, his central processor identifying their threat level. His eyes finally settle on Axl, and we see the computer readout from the Terminator's POV: **TARGET: W. AXL ROSE. ASSESSMENT: WASTE OF AMMO.** The Terminator gives a little half-grin, then turns and walks away.



Schwarzenegger: "Damn! I thought Indigo Girls were playing tonight."

money for the 9 Tre Gangsters, a Bloods-affiliated street gang. And don't even get us started on those O.G.s at Enron ...

Who was the first rock star to tie a scarf around his microphone stand?

Tricia Singer, Charlotte, NC

That boho-chic look has lately been adopted by all sorts of pop stars, from Carrie Underwood to Lindsay Lohan. But the man most frequently associated with the mic-stand scarf, Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, insists he was the first, and we couldn't find any evidence to contradict him.

According to Tyler, it started as an accident. "Very early on," he tells *Blender*, "I had a favorite macramé shirt that I wore onstage all the time and an Indian scarf in my hair"—*très* dude looks like a lady. "The shirt and scarf got worn out and torn off me eventually," he says, but rather than throw them out, Tyler "hung them on the mic stand for good luck. Must be the gypsy in me." The look stuck, and it's now one of his trademarks.

Interestingly, in addition to look-

ing cool, the scarves doubled as a make-shift medicine cabinet. "Some of them had little pockets sewn in," Tyler said in the band's 2003 autobiography, "and I'd weight them with Quaaludes and Tuinals. That way I wouldn't run out." Funny—our Aunt Sylvia used to do the same thing.



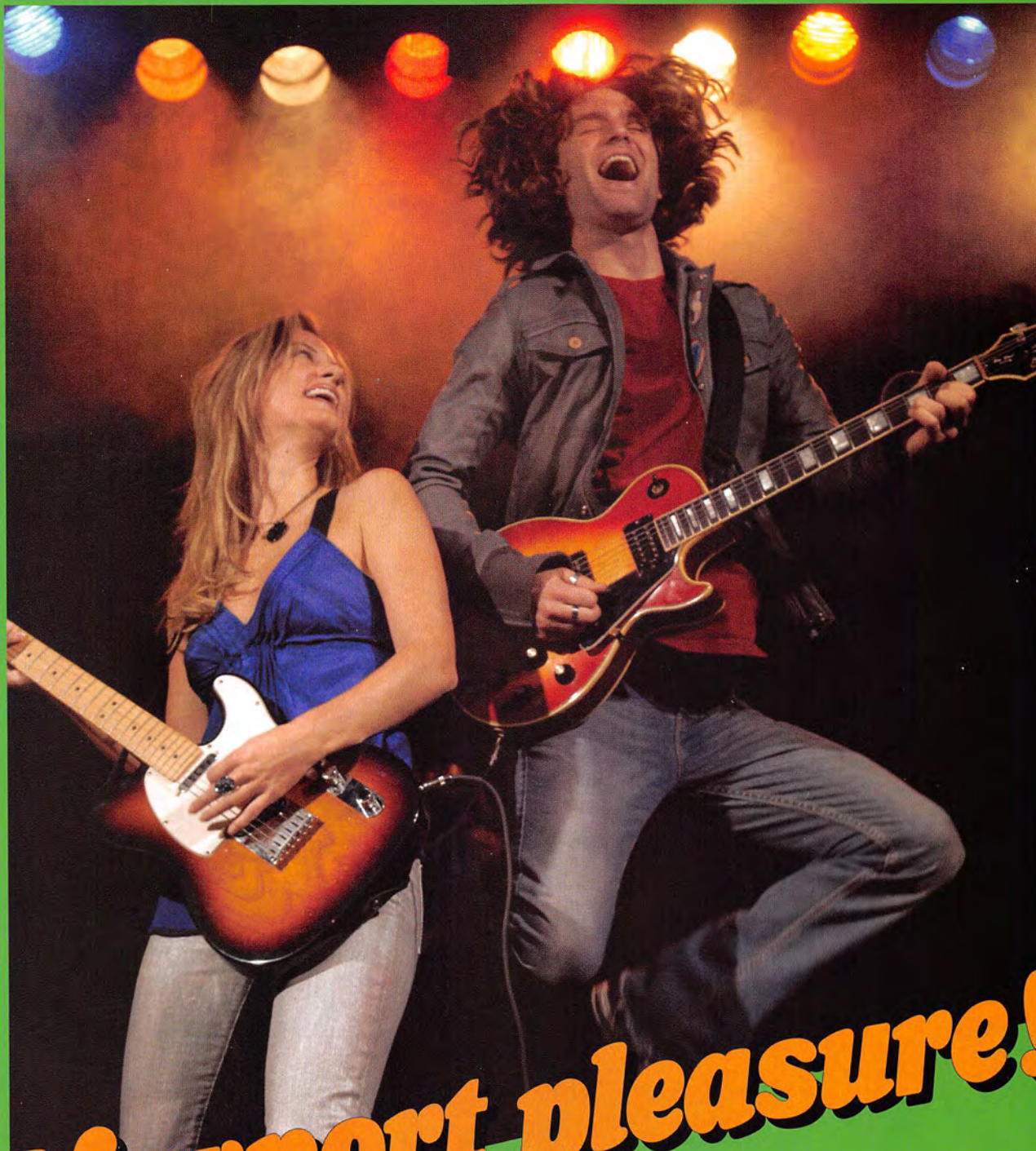
Lohan and Tyler: Say no to drugs, kids.



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Anthony Kiedis:
Cheerleading
captain, St. Ignatius
Girls' School,
Class of '81.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

HOW RED HOT CHILI PEPPER-IN-CHIEF
ANTHONY KIEDIS TRIUMPHED OVER A
QUARTER-CENTURY OF CRIPPLING DRUG
ADDICTION, BAND TRAGEDY AND
REGRETTABLE CROTCHWEAR TO BECOME
THE ZEN-EST DUDE IN ROCK



BY CHRIS NORRIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SIMON EMMETT

81

BLENDER.COM

➔ **YEARS AGO, ANTHONY** Kiedis and his bandmates were in New York courting an indifferent record industry. They took a time-out to chill in Central Park and were sitting there playing their demo on a boom box when suddenly—as Kiedis would later rap—“This baby rocked out on the spot/She was a-shakin’ and a-kickin’, that itty

bitty tot.” Struck by this toddler’s response, they then observed the same phenomenon in several more wee passersby. At this, the Red Hot Chili Peppers took heart. They may have been broke, their singer may have been a junkie, but their music, as the song title put it, had “baby appeal.” And there is a lesson in patience. Today, those babies are around 25 and the Chili Peppers are the biggest rock band in America.

Not necessarily the top-selling, mind you, but the most iconic, broadest-appealing, most consensus-building. Produced by rock-Midas Rick Rubin, the band’s huge, double-CD *Stadium Arcadium*

has not only gone twice platinum but has also earned the ultimate mainstream accolade of six Grammy nominations, including one for Album of the Year. After a long, insanely turbulent career, singer Kiedis, bassist Michael “Flea” Balzary, guitarist John Frusciante and drummer Chad Smith have found themselves on a new—and, for them, very strange—plateau. Seven years ago their peers were Limp Bizkit; now they’re U2.

The narrative defies all rock physics. They formed, lost a key member (guitarist Hillel Slovak, to an overdose), survived, kept recording, kept touring and, two *decades* into their career, hit their creative peak. A bunch of jokers who started out as a punk-rock party gag no one took seriously—themselves included—have become exemplars of the grand rock tradition.

But don’t look to Anthony Kiedis for tears and speeches. It’s a December afternoon, poolside at the Viceroy hotel, and the 44-year-old Kiedis is visibly content to be back in Santa Monica. While our cabana’s little heater is doing its best, this is hardly what you’d

summon if you were California dreaming on such a winter’s day: cold, overcast, gloomy—far from tube-sock weather. But Kiedis, just back from the band’s final European tour stop, has seen chillier.

“We flew straight from Stockholm to Inglewood,” he says. “And don’t try to take that flight—it doesn’t exist. We debated whether to arrive home richer or happier and chose happier.” The other three Peppers have scampered to the four corners, leaving Kiedis here alone to bear witness to their glory. As it happens, he’s also the perfect spokesman: the one who’s taken the most lumps, broken the most bones and, arguably, done the most growing.

Right now, he’s sipping a cup of Peet’s coffee (which he forbids himself on tour) and wearing a comfy black V-neck sweater, dark-blue jeans and some gold, well-padded Nikes he acquired after a doctor told him he’d broken bones in both feet by jumping from drum kit to stage. “I played a lot of the tour like that,” he says.

Such is hardly the worst Kiedis has endured fighting the Chili Pepper fight—an epic campaign in which he has suffered everything from shin splints to wrecked vertebrae to egregious comparisons to the Rolling Stones—British elders in black-music-, substance- and model-appreciation. The analogy’s not *totally* preposterous: hepcat, roots-plumbing musicians who became rock’s leading brand. This too Kiedis fields manfully.

“They’ve made great music,” he says of the Stones. “But they don’t seem like something I’d like us to be. They don’t seem to have a real band unity. I don’t know that they enjoy the process as much.”

And the process—Kiedis Zen-ishly suggests—*is* the reward.

“I mean, it’s exciting to get nominations,” he says. “It’s a thrill to hear that the two years we dedicated to making this record mattered. That people got it and felt it. But the ultimate moment of joy and approval happens the minute we write a song. It’s the minute that Chad hears something in John’s playing and I start hearing a



Kiedis and girlfriend Heather Christie enjoy a little ... um ... we'll just be over here ...



Kiedis and Christie: "You let go!" "No, you let go!"



"THE ROLLING STONES HAVE MADE GREAT MUSIC. BUT THEY DON'T SEEM LIKE SOMETHING I'D LIKE US TO BE."

melody—and then by the end of the day we've got a song."

That's the buzz, he says. Not the chicks, the loot, the fame or the awards. It's the journey. And he actually appears to be sticking to this line of crap.

"In that moment, I feel that the universe says, 'Good job,'" he continues. "You were there to hear the music that the universe had to offer you, and you put it into a song, and now a little girl in New Jersey can go feel that energy in her bedroom."

Ah. A girl in her bedroom. Now we're getting somewhere.



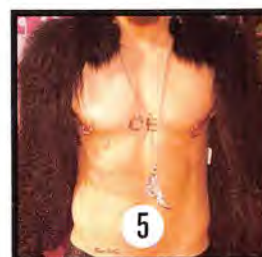
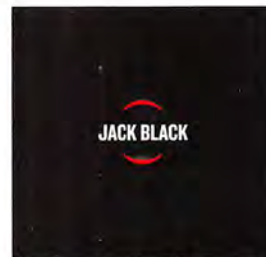
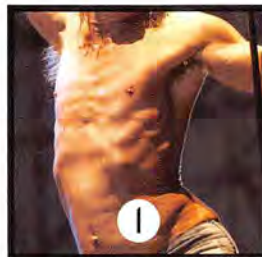
LONGTIME FANS OF the Chili Peppers know that their vibe has been more than a bit on the randy side—despite the rootsy elegies and soaring psychedelia that characterize their latest work. And, as the band evolved from rubber-faced nudists to battered soul survivors, their singer was always the one walking point, honing their decidedly West Coast blend of carnal, humanist and mystical. So if Kiedis sounds a bit New Age for an American rock star, it's helpful to remember that he isn't really American. He's Los Angeleno—alongside Beek, Ice Cube and Vince Neil, one of the most profoundly L.A.-made members of his generation.

Raised mostly in Hollywood by his father, a sometime actor and Sunset Boulevardier, he grew up splitting time between the drug-gy corners of downtown L.A. and the woody arcadias of northern California (also making periodic trips to Michigan to stay with his mom). Enconced in the late-'70s rock scene and the early-'80s film biz (playing Sylvester Stallone's son in *F.I.S.T.*), he wandered an erratic path through Hollywood decadence, punk aggression and Big Sur spirituality. With Fairfax High buddies Flea and

Slovak he formed a gag band for a talent show, tapped unexpected rockingness and began a two-decade process that would leave him a strange, highly paid combination of Laguna bohemian, Venice muscle boy, recovering junkie, Tantric-sex god, Gen X mosh star and, most recently, confident rock singer. "We were all trying to have fun and meet girls and take drugs and live the kind of life we'd read about in books," says Bob Forrest, singer for L.A. band Thelionious Monster, Kiedis's former roommate and his decades-long friend. "No one ever thought *this* would happen." >>

Take It Off!

Match each chronically shirtless rocker with his respective torso. No peeking!



1. Iggy Pop 2. Kid Rock 3. Anthony Kiedis 4. Jack Black 5. Dave Navarro

As he would be the first to admit, Kiedis's success is the Chili Peppers' success. Almost no other band shares the kind of brotherhood that he has with childhood pal Flea and the two newer members—the four have been together for well over a decade. Their songs, too, are a group effort, a product of jams and free association. But on *Stadium Arcadium* and its supporting tours, Kiedis was hands-down Most Improved: supporting the mighty grooves with a sure and full vocal presence and supplying the lyrical ruminations on wayward girls, drowsy civilizations and mass Californiapocalypse. It's the voice of a banged-up, chastened and compassionate low-life veteran.

No one would have bet on this. On just the second page of Kiedis's best-selling 2004 memoir, *Scar Tissue*, the list of stuff that's gone into his veins includes "cocaine, speed, Black Tar heroin, Persian heroin and, once, even LSD." (What, no Drano?) And the tabloid accounts of his former paramours read so much like a who's-who of the beautiful and famous as to suggest a postpunk Frank Sinatra. Instead of Ava Gardner, Marilyn Monroe and Mia Farrow, we've got Ione Skye, Sofia Coppola, Sinéad O'Connor, Heidi Klum—plus wild cards like German punk-cabaret singer Nina Hagen thrown in for good measure. When you've loved and lost like Kiedis has, then you know what life's about. Or at least you look like you do.

And indeed the man who sits coffee-sipping before *Blender* is no fresh-faced kid. His straight chestnut hair is shoulder-length and center-parted, giving his narrow face a carved American Indian look that may show early signs of Iggy Pop syndrome. His dark eyes seem warm if slightly guarded, his demeanor easygoing, his speech thoughtful. He obligingly reveals the latest tattoo on his famously inked-up body: a beautifully rendered koi fish on his forearm.

"It's a symbol of overcoming adversity," he says. "Of swimming up-current, so to speak." Around his left wrist he wears a diver's watch and a red string. The latter, he says, "reminds me not to fuck with people. It's supposed to prevent you from receiving the negative intentions of other people, which I'm not terribly worried about. But I do need a reminder not to throw negative fireballs at others."

It's a thoughtful gesture. Because, simply by surviving and thriving, Kiedis has become one of the foremost potential bad influences for a new generation. For decades, whenever youngsters were inclined to experiment with their lifestyle, certain public figures were there to make the choice seem viable. There was Beat writer William S. Burroughs: unrepentant heroin, pill and Moroccan-boy aficionado—

And How!

The part-Mohican Kiedis isn't the only pop-culture icon with Native American roots

CHER

Singer, 1/16 Cherokee

JOHNNY DEPP

Actor, 1/4 Cherokee



CHUCK NORRIS

Martial arts badass, 1/2 Cherokee

Before he learned to shatter spines with a glance and kill men with the flick of a toenail, Norris was simply the child of Irish/Cherokee parents in Ryan, Oklahoma.

LACROSSE

Sport, part Iroquois

WAYNE NEWTON

Singer, part Powhatan and part Cherokee

JESSICA BIEL

Actress, part Choctaw

This 25-year-old hottie made her name playing all-American daughter Mary Camden on *7th Heaven*—but even Camden wasn't as American as Biel, who claims Choctaw ancestry.

HEATHER LOCKLEAR

Actress, part Lumbee

JAMES EARL JONES

Actor, part Cherokee



JIMI HENDRIX

Musician, 1/4 Cherokee

Army parachutist, virtuoso guitarist and tragic vomit-choker Hendrix spent much of his childhood in the care of his grandmother, a full-blooded Cherokee.

JAMES GARNER

Actor, 1/4 Cherokee

TORI AMOS

Singer, part Cherokee

VAL KILMER

Actor, 1/8 Cherokee

THE POTATO CHIP

Snack food, 1/2 Huron

In 1853, a chef named George Crum sliced a batch of potatoes too thin, fried them and inadvertently invented the chip. Trans-fat junkies, this is your god.

DELLA REESE

Actress, 1/2 Cherokee

THE RUBBER BALL

Toy, part Olmec

HARD ROCK CAFÉ

Club chain, part Seminole

When members of the Seminole tribe of Florida agreed to pay \$965 million for the Hard Rock company in late 2006, they announced the purchase with a traditional prayer from their rainmaker.

MANHATTAN

Borough, part Lenape



do—lived to be 180. Keith Richards: incorrigible partier and millionaire—once quipped, "I've never had a problem with drugs, I've had problems with police." And now Kiedis—who has survived the drug-related deaths of bandmate Slovak and friends River Phoenix, Kurt Cobain and many others, stayed a junkie for years after and finally made it to health, wealth and sobriety—unscathed. Does he feel responsibility to counsel others against bad choices?

"I don't," he says. "I've lost the need to push my ideas or experiences on other people." He does, however, make a savvy point. "It's easy to be a junkie. It's not easy to be one of the greatest >>

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The Black Keys

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The Futureheads

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Tokyo Police Club

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Arcade Fire

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guitar players of all time, or one of the greatest writers."

As an alt-rock-credentialed artist with incongruously great abs, Kiedis acknowledges he's walking a different path from most of his cultural heroes. "The majority of the music that I love comes from people who are in rebellion against the physical part of their lives," he says. "Joey Ramone, for instance. But I think the two go together great. There's something absolutely freeing about being able to turn your body into a whirling dervish. There's a reason why people have danced for 20,000 years. Dancing gets the attention of the spirits."

If not the spirits, *something's* clearly working in Kiedis's favor. At 44, he has the body of a surf stud. While in his book he has copped to shooting ozone—as treatment for hepatitis C—there's got to be some other health secret. Ashtanga yoga? Tai chi? Strippercise?

Nope. He doesn't even work out. "The last time I worked out was probably in 1990," he says. "Somewhere along the way I realized that I could get my body to be the way I wanted without working out."

His only secret, he says, is Pepperdorm. "Performing, dancing and singing simultaneously—if you can do all that and hit the notes, you're in there. My nurse recently went to karaoke and tried to do 'Can't Stop' and said that halfway through she was out of breath. And she's an athlete."

Indeed, the life of a funk-rock shaman is no day at the gym. One might assume that even sans drugs, this arm-candied bachelor still pursues various libidinal excesses. Few public figures have made sex such a central part of their message as did the frontman who blazed through rock's flannel-clad, bummers-nursing '90s as an odd stud out—only seeming part of rock's sexual mainstream during our regretful ho-macking Limp Bizkit era. But this is not an association he cherishes.

"Yeah," he says, after a lengthy exhale. "Energetically, I've certainly been guilty of that which I don't support. Obviously, sex can have a dark side." And it's one the modern world can make darker. "When I finally got a computer, I discovered this limitless world of pornography. And I recognized the feeling that I was having was like the feeling that I used to get when I'd go score drugs. I actually had to make a commitment to myself to stop."

So, ix-nay on the o's-hay? "I don't really attract that kind of energy now, anyway," he says of casual hookups. "You really get what

you put out there." A serial monogamist—albeit a monogamist whose recently reported squeezes were models Jaime Rishar and Jessica Stam—Kiedis is now more interested in permanence. "And you don't want to date a fan. I don't think I would be attracted to someone who's too attracted to me. My Spidey sense doesn't allow that."

Instead, his Spidey sense most recently drew him to a young woman he first espied at a rooftop party in Hollywood. "I saw this beautiful face smiling throughout the night," he recalls. He said hello, found out she had a boyfriend, but cadged a commitment to have coffee. After some time apart, he and 20-year-old Heather Christie reconnected and began dating, and they are now cohabitating. "On paper there was no reason

whatsoever we should have gotten along," he says of Christie, who on their first date took him on a tour of her hometown of Simi Valley. "But when I hung out with her, I didn't want to hang out with anybody else."

They're even considering a little Kiedis. "Yes, I wanna have kids," he confirms.

Thus, the new Kiedis. He lives in L.A. but not Hollywood. He prefers his Vespa to his Harley. ("Not as fast, but quieter and I

can write songs while I ride.") And as far as music goes, Kiedis's tastes have broadened if not mellowed. "I'll listen to anything now," he says. "I even try to keep an open mind for simple pop music, which I used to make a living detesting."

Shortly after we wrap at the hotel, *Blender* meets a source of this broadmindedness. After he begged off to go check on his slightly under-the-weather girlfriend, Kiedis cell-phoned to say she'd invited *Blender* for lunch.

Slim and angel-faced, with auburn hair and a flannel shirt, Christie sits at the bar of a gourmet diner across the street from the hotel, wearing a butterfly pendant from celebrity designer Tarina Tarantino around her neck—a recent gift from Kiedis.

While the two chat over tuna salad with truffle oil, Kiedis obliges *Blender* by following up an earlier line of questioning: "Maybe you can clarify something," he says to Heather. "He asked if we had musical arguments. I told him that you were a big Nick Lachey lover."

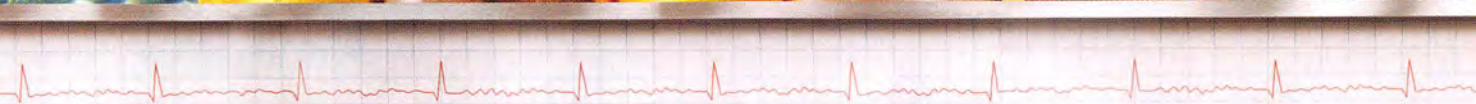
"What!?" Heather says. "Not really." Then she adds, "Oh, and by the way, John Frusciante also likes Nick Lachey."

"No!"

"I'm serious."

Heather explains that the former >>

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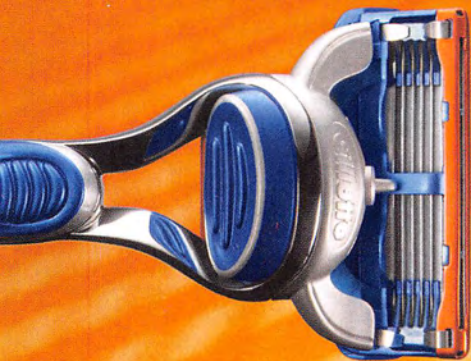
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Above, from left: Chili Peppers John Frusciante, Kiedis, Flea and Chad Smith. Right: Kiedis and Co., positively glowing at Woodstock '94.



Mr. Jessica Simpson shared an afternoon with the Red Hot Chili Peppers on *TRL* and took three takes performing his hit. "By the third time he sang it, John was like, 'I really like this song,'" she reports. "And he learned it on his guitar."

Kiedis resumes the questioning: "So what do I play that you're just like, 'No. Turn it off?'"

"You mean, besides the Rolling Stones?!" she exclaims.

Later, Kiedis reveals that Heather was one of the inspirations for the new song "She's Only 18." It begins "She's only 18/Don't like the Rolling Stones." It's an immutable law of love that you can't enjoy or detest a song with the same passion once someone you love feels otherwise.

"Hey," Kiedis says, gently nudging Heather. "Did I ruin Nick Lachey for you?"



LUCKILY, THERE ARE other artists, other bands. And in fact, one of Kiedis's new faves happens to have a gig the very next day. It's an up-and-coming local act called the Jack Bambis. At Kiedis's urging, *Blender* agrees to catch their show.

The gig is on a beautiful, clear-skied Sunday at a farmer's market held in a Los Feliz parking lot. Food stands sell gourmet tamales. Near the entrance, amps, monitors and a carpet-bound drum set have been hastily arranged. And as two pint-size,

shaggy-haired, Kurt Cobain-looking kids pick up guitar and bass, it's clear the Jack Bambis have a good four decades before they're eligible for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Guitarist Indio (son of Robert Downey Jr.), bassist Jasper and lead singer Lia are all 13. Drummer Cash, a sprout in a backward navy baseball hat, is 9, son of a long-time Kiedis friend. As the quartet bashes out a raw but intimidatingly accomplished swamp-metal boogie, the ambience is something between a Minutemen show and a PTA meeting, with grizzled rock vets and Beverly Hills soccer moms cheering on the kids.

Standing to the side, arm in arm with Heather, Kiedis looks down next to him to see a tyke of 3 in a tiny hoodie that says north shore surf. Exposed to the raucous bashing, the kid is simply losing it: bouncing uncontrollably, stomping either foot, flailing his stubby arms, banging his downy head. He looks happily possessed.

Kiedis leans over and starts an impromptu pas de deux: squaring off with the tot, throwing his arms out like a boxer, aiding and abetting the wee toddler rock.

"This little guy here is their biggest fan," the boy's mom yells over the din. The little guy looks up at Kiedis and beams. Kiedis, deadpan behind his shades, continues his loose-limbed boogie—then rises to get back to his girl. [BLENDER]

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Hey, nice ass! The Shins (from left): Dave Hernandez, Jesse Sandoval, James Mercer, Eric Johnson and Marty Crandall.



SHIN- ING!

Don't let the wholesome looks fool you—indie darlings turned mainstream popsters **THE SHINS** contend with drugs, mayhem, insecurity and supermodels like any rock band. They just do it more ... *maturely*

By Steve Kandell
Photography by Peter Yang

I

IT'S A DECEMBER night at Seattle's Key Arena, site of local rock station 107.7 The End's annual, all-star-ish Christmas concert, the Deck the Hall Ball. My Chemical Romance have just finished their set of anguished anthems, and the predominantly teenage, presumably disaffected ball-goers howl in appreciation before the turntable stage rotates to reveal the next act on the bill: Ladies and gentlemen, from Portland, Oregon ... the Shins!

"Immediately after the biggest pump-your-fist-in-the-air band, we're on, and people are just standing there looking at us," bassist Dave Hernandez drawls in a surfer-dude patois the day after the show. "It was like dropping a Quaalude in everyone's Red Bull."

Three years ago, the notion of this modest retro-pop outfit performing for a sold-out basketball arena full of kids half their age would have been hard to fathom. Yet ever since "New Slang," from their 2001 debut, *Oh, Inverted World*, merited a glowing mention in the hit romantic comedy *Garden State*, the Shins have stood with one foot in the blogger world, where an 8.9 Pitchfork rating (awarded to 2003's sophomore record, *Chutes Too Narrow*) is the ultimate currency, and the other dipped in the mainstream, where success is measured in actual legal-tender currency. Like Death Cab for Cutie or the Arcade Fire, the Shins are what the kids this week are calling "yindie" rock: half yuppie, half indie—palatable enough for the masses, edgy enough for the snobs.

The balancing act gets more intriguing with the release of *Winning the Night Away*, their new, seemingly backlash-proof record that flirts with "experimental third album" syndrome while enhancing the charms of its predecessors. The Shins no longer have buzz—they have a career. For this they have to thank their leader, a shy, self-taught studio rat who has quietly morphed into one of indie rock's most sure-footed innovators and most benevolent dictators.

CRUISING THE LABYRINTHINE aisles of Powell's City of Books, a 68,000-square-foot bookstore in downtown Portland, Shins singer-guitarist/big cheese James Mercer would sooner be mistaken for an assistant manager (or Kevin Spacey) than a pop savant who has sold

nearly a million records. Slender and bespectacled, wearing jeans and a moth-eaten gray sweater, the 36-year-old holds a cup of drive-thru coffee in one hand and a copy of Charles C. Mann's historical nonfiction tome *1491* in the other. Yet he is not anonymous—two scruffy guys in their 20s, dressed almost identically to Mercer, stop and ask him to autograph a glossy music monthly. The Shins are on the cover.

The embodiment of the "Rock stars—they're just like us!" aesthetic, Mercer has an appeal that lies in his everydude approachability and willingness to please; he wrote the name of a fan he met in Australia into the lyrics of *Winning the Night Away*'s first single, "Phantom Limb," simply because she asked him to. And he refuses to be cynical about the fact that his band's big break came from a Zach Braff movie. The sheer audacity of the scene—Natalie Portman places headphones on Braff's ears, promising that

the ghostly, plaintive "New Slang" will *change his life*—seems only to set the band up for mockery, and even inspired a blog called *The Shins Will Change Your Life*, which collected bits of hyperbolic music criticism. Yet Mercer believes, as must the 600,000 folks who bought Shins albums after seeing the flick, that the line hit a nerve because there's truth to it.

"I remember when I was recording 'New Slang,' it would transport me out of this little studio apartment I was in," he says. "There's something about the song that has this rich atmosphere. I'm proud someone thought it could carry a scene and touch people." He shrugs. "That's amazing."

"It was the first song I heard of theirs, and it floored me," says Jonathan Poneman, president and cofounder of Sub Pop, the Shins' label. "James created this aural world that was so intriguing and realized. It's easy to say now, but the impact of that song, without the >>

"PEOPLE THINK I'M A BETTER PERSON
THAN I AM, JUST BECAUSE OF THESE PRETTY SONGS."

JAMES MERCER



Rollin' thunder: The Shins (left) wait for quintuples skate; Natalie Portman (above) shows off her cans in *Garden State*.

6'5"

6'5"

6'0"

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5'5"

5'5"

5'0"

5'0"

4'5"

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hype, was immediate and deep."

One thing *Garden State* does get right is that the Shins are a headphones band. Even "New Slang," consisting of little more than vocals, acoustic guitar and tambourine, sounds almost orchestral, while new songs, like "Red Rabbits," are meticulously layered, even if their foundations are as simple as lullabies. Like R.E.M. 20 years ago, the Shins cherry-pick elements of mid-'60s Anglo-pop—compact structure, complex melodies and kitchen-sink experimentation—and reassemble them. But while Michael Stipe mumbled his willfully obscure lyrics, Mercer sings his clear as day.

Mercer claims he's not very well read, even as he rests his hand on the 500-page history book he just bought. But his dense wordplay, the kind that Panic! At the Disco would give their left arm-garters for, suggests otherwise—the scathing kiss-off "Turn On Me," *Winning's* catchiest song, references John Updike and Lewis Carroll in the same verse. "Phantom Limb" renders teenage ennui with poignant resignation ("Another afternoon of *Goat Head* tunes and pilfered booze"), a "Born to Run" for people too lazy to leave. There are landscapes, woodland creatures and acts of violence—not always amounting to narrative payoff, but plenty engrossing. "I think Don DeLillo's impressive," says Mercer, taking a seat in the bookstore's bustling cafe. "When you read someone who's strong with metaphors, it makes you want to do that."

Mercer spent the better part of two years doing just that, holed up at home, writing and recording and tinkering and then booking studio time for his bandmates—Hernandez, 36; keyboardist Marty Crandall, 31; and drummer Jesse Sandoval, 32—to record their parts. "I don't know, it could be some twisted ego thing," he says of his preference to work alone, "or just a desire to fully develop an idea. I want any impulse I have to at least be attempted. I've gotten frustrated by situations in the past where that couldn't happen."

If Mercer is autocratic as a bandleader, he couldn't be more accommodating as a host, happy to show *Blender* around the town he's called home since moving from Albuquerque in 2001. Thanks to *Winning the Night Away's* long gestation period and the extra touring that followed the *Garden State* bonanza, it's been nearly four years since Mercer has had new music to talk about. He asks if *Blender* likes the album (we do) and if we think its prerelease Internet leak will dissuade fans from buying it (we don't). Mercer wants to pick up the most recent Kings of Leon album and asks if we can stop by his favorite record store, across town. We can.



WITH ITS MIX of urbanity and natural beauty, its vaguely *Twin Peaks*-like oddball vibe and its favorable real estate market, Portland



(THIS SIDEBAR)

WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE

ACCORDING TO CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST JOSE ARCAVA, THINGS OTHER THAN POP SONGS CAN AFFECT YOU DEEPLY. HERE ARE A FEW!

DEATH OF A SPOUSE

WHY IT'S MORE LIFE-CHANGING THAN A SHINS SONG:

"Anything that affects your responsibilities will cause stress. In the case of losing a spouse, the conflict is going to be isolation."

DOCTOR'S ORDERS:

"Don't isolate yourself while your spouse is still alive; maintain relationships with others."

MARRIAGE

WHY IT'S MORE LIFE-CHANGING THAN A SHINS SONG:

"Marriage isn't just publicly declaring your love for someone—it's a monetary contract. The institution itself is a stress."

DOCTOR'S ORDERS:

"Consult a lawyer and air out issues, then commit this to paper—feelings can change."

RETIREMENT

WHY IT'S MORE LIFE-CHANGING THAN A SHINS SONG:

"You're giving up your former identity and the activity that took up all your time."

DOCTOR'S ORDERS:

"Develop mental flexibility by taking on a hobby—the whole area of adult education is based around retirees. For example, I'm 61 now, and I'm learning Russian!"

VIOLENT CRIME

WHY IT'S MORE LIFE-CHANGING THAN A SHINS SONG:

"Armed robbery, to say nothing of rape, assault or burglary, causes a sense of violation on a par with post-traumatic shock from combat."

DOCTOR'S ORDERS:

"Psychotherapy is mandatory. You don't want this lying around in your subconscious."

has become a haven for indie rockers of a certain age. Frank Black, Stephen Malkmus, the Decemberists, Modest Mouse and Sleater-Kinney have all lived here; so certainly there's some biweekly coffee klatch where everyone swaps Lollapalooza war stories and compares Bugaboo prices.

"Uh, not really," Mercer says, driving his late-model silver VW Golf up Burnside Street. "We had friends here and always had a great time coming on tour. Portland is just a cool place to live, and it's cheap."

Picking up and moving somewhere new is hardly a novel concept for James Mercer. His father was in the Air Force, so he lived in Hawaii until he was 4, then Albuquerque, then Germany and England; he then returned to New Mexico after high school. "The cool thing is you're mixed together with a blend of people," he says. "But you don't have long friendships. You meet somebody, and then summer comes and they're gone."

Since his father sang country-western tunes in nightclubs for all of Mercer's life, logic dictates that Mercer would have combated the rigors of transience by immersing himself in music. Right? "I never had a guitar until my 18th birthday," he says. "I think because my dad played music, I never had any interest." After a year of college, he dropped out and started playing My Bloody Valentine tunes with his friend Neal Langford. "I was shy—Neal took me by the hand and forced me to go onstage. I didn't have anything else going on—maybe if I'd lived in New York, I'd be a realtor."

Inside Music Millennium on East Burnside, *Blender* unearths 1997's *When You Land Here, It's Time to Return*, the lone album released by the Albuquerque band Flake Music, featuring Mercer, Sandoval, Langford and Crandall. "Albuquerque was such a macho place—every band wanted to sound like that heavy Seattle shit,"

Mercer recalls. "And you know what? We were pussies."

The band to which the Shins are most often compared is the Beach Boys, although Mercer insists he didn't even own a copy of *Pet Sounds* until recently. Both groups are fronted by headstrong studio wizards with a knack for falsetto vocals and aural trickery. (The beat on the new "Sea Legs" is built around a plastic bag popping and a guitar pick scraping across teeth.) And like Brian Wilson, Mercer found his greatest work shaped by a drug problem. Unlike Wilson, however, Mercer did not actually ingest the drugs in question.



"THAT GUY COMING up the sidewalk now, that's Frank."

We are idling across the street from a known crack den in northeast Portland, and Mercer is explaining the operation. He knows this not from watching *The Wire*, but because the green house next door, with the heron weather vane on the roof, was his. Living—>>

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(THE SHINS)

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GENERAL TIRE

and writing songs—three feet away from violence and despair and crack whores threw Mercer into a navel-gazing funk that dominates *Winning the Night Away*, even as the music remains playful. “It’s almost a bait-and-switch,” Mercer says. “People think I’m a better person than I am, just because of these pretty songs.”

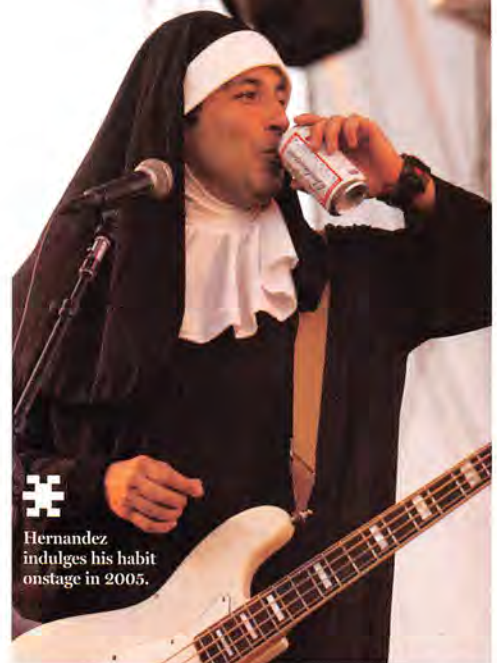
Mercer’s voice rises in pitch and pace as he surveys the block. “Someone was killed on the street,” he says. “Right here. And one day I heard six gunshots around the corner. I don’t think it’s fascinating in that suburban-hip-hop way.” He’d call the police, but all that did was garner death threats. And slowly his anger shifted from the individuals causing the trouble to the social constructs that made the trouble a given. “They moved here from the South in the ‘60s, and I just picture all their hopes falling to shit as ghetto culture came into existence—the drugs, the pimping, the crime. I remember sitting in my yard and watching Frank, who I used to see beat his dog all the time, playing with his little granddaughter, and the notions I had developed about these people and their world did not allow for that. Because I’m Frank. I’m the same creature.”

None of this made Mercer much fun to be around; nor did the fact that his house was robbed of, among other possessions, his *Oh, Inverted World* masters. A messy breakup didn’t help, but meeting Marisa Kula, a writer who was doing a story on the Shins, did—they married last April and moved across town to a house that they later learned was once Elliott Smith’s. They’re expecting their first kid in May.

“I think the experience turned James into a man,” says Crandall, in a rare non-wiseass-y moment. “He feared for his life and for his loved one, and he decided to grab hold of the things he cherishes.”

After the crack-house tour, the band convenes at Crandall’s rented Victorian in northeast Portland, which now serves as their rehearsal space. While Sandoval admits to taking drum lessons just to keep up with Mercer’s increasingly complex songs, it seems the biggest obstacle to the Shins’ maturation as a musical entity is *Guitar Hero II*. Crandall, who would handily win a Chris Parnell look-alike competition, should one ever exist, plays “Carry On Wayward Son” head-to-head with Hernandez on a plasma screen the size of the monolith from *2001*. Crandall’s girlfriend of seven years is Elyse Sewell, best known to *America’s Next Top Model* obsessives as the waifish first-season runner-up who called one of her competitors a “shit-slice.”

“I taught her that word!” Crandall says, beaming. “People think, He’s in a rock band, she’s a model, it must be like *E! True*



Hernandez indulges his habit onstage in 2005.

Hollywood Story! But here’s all you need to know: I bagged her when she was 17.”

Rehearsal begins. Kinda. Sandoval nibbles on a chicken wing as Hernandez’s fiancée uncorks a bottle of wine. Crandall acts as sergeant-at-arms, referring to a spiral notebook as he shouts out which songs need to be worked on. Fruit Bats’ Eric Johnson is on board as a fifth Shin, instantly rendering the band more versatile and more hirsute. Facing one another in a circle, they loosen up with a shambolic cover of “War Pigs,” inspired by Sandoval’s *Guitar Hero* rendition, before launching into a half-dozen Shins songs. Crandall’s roommate’s chocolate Lab, Chewie, sits in the center watching Mercer sing, tail wagging in approval.

After Mercer and Crandall duet on *Winning’s* bouncy “Australia,” in the voice of Edith Bunker, discussion somehow drifts to Bob Seger’s masterful 1976 virgin-defiling ballad “Night Moves.” “That song *will* move you,” Hernandez says. The rehearsal devolves into a debate over whether listening to the song during a romantic moment might cause one to inadvertently fantasize that one’s partner is Seger himself, and, moreover, whether that would be such a bad thing. (The consensus: not really.) Beers are consumed, mistakes are made and corrected. Who could ask for more?

James Mercer. Though he’s making a nice living playing precisely the music he wants with his friends, and he has a new wife and a baby on the way, his own ambition makes him fidgety. “Sometimes I feel slightly restricted by living up to the earnestness Shins fans might require,” he says earnestly, days after the rehearsal. “I’d like to have more fun and not feel like I was stepping too far outside some aesthetic realm.” *Blender* reminds him that the Shins, by design, are whatever he wants them to be, and Mercer sighs a bit. “I guess part of me worries that we’ve got this thing that’s working. I don’t want to mess it up.” [BLENDER]

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(THE DEVIL IN)

Miss Jones

NORAH JONES, POP'S PIANO-PLAYING ANTI-BIMBO, ON HER DIRTY MOUTH, HER CRUSH ON SHAKIRA AND WHY SHE DOESN'T CARE IF YOU CALL HER "SNORAH"



BY JOSH EELLS

NORAH JONES COULD really go for a hamburger. Nestled in an armchair in a downtown-Manhattan recording studio on a wintry afternoon, she has a craving no mere soy substitute can satisfy. "I've been on a health kick lately," she says, patting her tummy. "Right now I'm trying to make tofu taste good. But I love me some burgers. I used to live over by this place Corner Bistro, in the West Village? Man, that's a damn good burger. I'd end up there at four in the morning, really, really drunk. You don't even remember it till you wake up the next morning—like, 'Why do I smell like onions?'"

Getting wasted, gorging herself, passing out—this is Norah Jones? As it turns out, the mocha-eyed piano chanteuse is actually a bit of a badass, despite what her Whole Foods-frequenting NPR fan base might suggest. The daughter of sitar legend and Beatles confrere Ravi Shankar, Jones, 27, grew up with her mom in Dallas before moving to New York at 20 to pursue music full-time. Her 2002 debut, *Come Away With Me*, was an unexpected smash—a hushed, cozy collection of jazz and country standards and modest originals (Jones calls it "sleepy") that went on to sell a colossal 10 million copies. Since then, she's won eight Grammys, sold 5 million copies of her follow-up (the warmer, twangier *Feels Like Home*) and duetted with a slew of wide-ranging admirers, including Dolly Parton, André 3000 and Elmo. ("He totally grabbed my ass," she says, grinning.)

This year might be Jones's most pivotal yet. Her just-released third album, *Not Too Late*, is the first on which she's written or cowritten every song. This summer she'll also make her acting debut, starring alongside Jude Law and Natalie Portman in *My Blueberry Nights*, a film by art-house auteur Wong Kar-Wai. Today, Jones—radiant in jeans and an Oscar the Grouch T-shirt—is ready to let loose. "I wish everyone would say what they really think," she declares, "and not be afraid of turning people off." →



nj

Norah Jones:
"To-ga! To-ga!"



Let's start with your childhood. Did you have any nicknames growing up?

When I was in fourth grade I ran for class president as NoJo. This was during the whole Flo Jo craze—pre-J. Lo. Oh, and there was one girl who always called me “Bitch,” but really, I think she was just projecting.

You were an only child with a single mom. Were you two more like friends than mother-daughter?

Like the Gilmore girls? We're very, very close—definitely way closer than any of my friends are with their parents. We talk on the phone at least ... well, too many times a day. I'm not gonna give you a number—you'll think I'm weird.

More than 10?

Not more than 10. But a lot.

What's the first concert you ever went to?

MC Hammer.

You're kidding.

Nope. I was 12. That was one of the first cassettes I ever bought.

Did you have the pants and everything?

Oh, of course! I also loved pop metal: Guns N' Roses, the Crüe. I had a rock & roll neighbor—her mom drove a Camaro—and I was always over at her house listening to Warrant albums. But I wasn't very rebellious. I went to an arts high school, and we were all band nerds who were into jazz.

You were sneaking out of the house to discuss alternate tunings?

Yeah—rock & roll! No, the drama kids

snuck out a lot, but I didn't really hang out with them. I had one drama friend—the first time I got drunk was when I spent the night at her house. Her parents were out of town, so we raided the liquor cabinet.

What were you drinking?

Rum and Dr Pepper. It was terrible—I got really sick. I haven't drunk Dr Pepper since.

So what are your vices now?

Hmm. Is my grandma gonna read this?

We'll see to it that she doesn't.

I like to have a beer or a martini. I've hung out in many a bar till closing time.

Are you a fun drunk?

I start talking a *lot*—and much louder than normal. I feel like such a dumbass the next day! But I never, like, take off my top and dance on the table.

Do you smoke?

Not currently. I've quit a couple of times—the last was about three months ago. I actually prefer my voice when I'm smoking. I'd love to sound like Cat Power without having to smoke cigarettes or drink a bottle of whiskey every day. I just have to

wait till I'm older, I guess.

How about pot?

Of course. I'm not a pothead, but, you know, sometimes. I don't smoke a lot, though, because I usually just fall asleep. And I get the munchies, but I don't have a problem with that. That's the best part.

Ever get high with your buddy Willie Nelson?

I'm not going near Willie's weed! My friend did once, and he had to go home and sleep for 12 hours. Willie's weed is no joke.

What's the worst thing a reviewer has said about your music?

This one writer called me Snorah Jones. At first it bothered me, but now I just think it's funny. My mom calls me Snorah all the time. And I know *Come Away With Me* is a sleepy record. God, if I could tell you how many people have come up to me and—as a compliment—said, “I listen to it every night. It puts me right to sleep.”

That's not really what you want to hear as a musician.

Doctors should prescribe it as a sleeping pill, what can I say? But my skin is a lot thicker than it was a few years ago.

So what criticism bothers you the most? Too slow, boring ...

Boring, I think. “Too slow” is a taste thing. But “boring”? That's just mean.

You have one side project that's an outlaw-country cover band and another where you wear a platinum wig and fishnets and play punk songs. Is that your way of taking a break from “boring” Norah?

Yeah, it's great for me to cut loose. Sometimes, especially at the beginning, I wasn't having fun, because of all the stress and pressure. Those bands are a way for me to just play at a pool hall, drink some beer and have a good time.

I
“I’VE HUNG OUT
IN MANY A BAR TILL
CLOSING TIME.”



Jones kicks out the jams with punky side project El Madmo, left, and gets high (on life) with Willie Nelson.

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One thing people often overlook is that your music is pretty sexy. It's a toned-down, subtle sexuality. But "Turn Me On," "I've Got to See You Again"—they're basically booty calls.

I never thought of it that way! When I'm singing, the goal is definitely to seduce. I'm not Beyoncé or Christina. If I'm gonna get you, I'm gonna get you by whispering.

Whose music puts you in the mood?

Like "in the mood" in the mood? [Laughs] Al Green doesn't hurt. Donny Hathaway.

If your boyfriend were to give you a free pass for a night—anyone, man or woman ... Probably Shakira. She's hot—I like that she's this pop star, but she's also kind of unique and weird. I always sing Shakira when I karaoke.

How many martinis does it take to get you on the karaoke stage?

Maybe two? The first time I went, I thought, This is so lame, people are gonna think I'm a loser. But it's so much fun.

You remind us of John Mayer, another artist who gets called "boring" but who's secretly fun and smart-alecky. Is it frustrating that people don't see that side of you?

I do think that, on my first two records, my real personality didn't come across at all. But who knows—if my image had been different, maybe the first record wouldn't have been so successful. Maybe because I was so ... *blank*, that's why it appealed to so many different kinds of people. It does frustrate me, though. I don't think I'm a stuffed shirt.

OK, so prove it: What's your favorite swear word?

Right now it's *balls*.

That's a good one!

I'm trying to get away from the F-word. You know, you start overusing a word and then it loses its power. So I've replaced it with *balls*. Every time I say it, I kind of giggle and snort to myself: "Oh, balls!"

Let's talk about your new album for a bit.

Yay! Now that you've ruined my reputation ...

It's darker than your first two, and surprisingly political.

I'm not a cynical person, but it's been hard to watch the news the past two years and not be scared. Global warming, hurricanes, the government, the war, the imminent decay of civilization. But I'm not being divisive with this record. These songs express my feelings—I'm not saying, "Think like me, I'm a blue-stater."

Well, you are a little. In "My Dear Country," for instance, you call President Bush "deranged."

No, I say, "Who knows, maybe he's *not* deranged." As in, maybe it'll actually get

nj

Clockwise from top left: Jones on the set of her acting debut, *My Blueberry Nights*; with boyfriend and bass player, Lee Alexander; tickling the ivories on the *Today* show; with the letter Y and Elmo on *Sesame Street*; and posing with her haul on Grammy night, 2003.



**"I'M NOT BEYONCÉ
OR CHRISTINA. IF
I'M GONNA GET
YOU, I'M GONNA GET
YOU BY
WHISPERING."**

better. I think it's important to stay hopeful, even if it's not realistic. And if people get turned off by these songs, then gosh, nice knowing you, and I'm sorry.

Are you, like the Dixie Chicks, ashamed that George Bush is from Texas?

I was taught never to talk politics in mixed company. But I *will* say that I'm not ashamed that the Dixie Chicks are from Texas.

You've sold more records than most tabloid pop stars or blingy hip-hoppers. Do you ever refer to yourself in the third person?

I try not to. NoJo don't play that.

Where do you keep all your Grammys?

They're in my closet. [Laughs] Still in the boxes. I live in New York—there's really no room in my apartment to display eight Grammys without being all, "Hey! Look at me!" And they're really heavy. I'm scared I'll drop one on my head. I can just see the headline: *norah jones murdered by her grammys*.

That seems unlikely. It would make for a pretty cool tombstone, though.

I don't want a tombstone—I want to be cremated. I've always thought the whole embalming-and-burial thing was creepy. I don't want to be decaying there in my clothes.

OK, then where would you be scattered?

Maybe someplace like Big Bend National Park, in West Texas. But hopefully I'll have a lot more time to think about that. [BLINDER]



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A PSYCHEDELIC THEME PARK IN THE DESERT



BY JONAH WEINER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TURE LILLEGRAVEN





THE GUYS IN MUSE (WITH GIRLS FROM THE LIKE), FROM
LEFT: Z BERG, CHARLOTTE FROOM, MATT BELLAMY, CHRIS
WOLSTENHOLME, DOM HOWARD AND TENNESSEE THOMAS.

URIOUS ABOUT THE traces of alien architecture on Mars? About the intergalactic message hidden in the Egyptian pyramids? How about the secret government's ongoing machinations to lead us into a police state? If so, Matt Bellamy, Muse's conspiracy-theory-obsessed singer and guitarist, is your man. He can expound on brain surveillance: "You can get through airport X-rays, go to a restaurant, put a knife in your pocket and bring it on board. It's clear that they don't *really* care about security. It's just a way to wear people down, to make them afraid and to prepare them for microchipping. They'll say, 'Put a chip in your brain and you can glide right through the searches.'" Or celestial beings: "Look at how so many religions refer to the heavens, to gods descending from above. It's logical to me that we have some connection to outer space."

Sitting down to dinner shortly before Muse perform at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, Bellamy makes an urgent argument for all-encompassing skepticism—especially where matters of governmental mind control and/or Martian rectal probing are concerned. His preoccupations should come as little surprise to anyone familiar with his music. For nearly 10 years, the Teignmouth, England, trio—Bellamy, bassist Chris Wolstenholme and drummer Dom Howard—have been cranking out bombastic rock about impending apocalypse, lost civilizations and more impending apocalypse.

Bellamy's extraterrestrial interests also help explain why, when offered \$848 of *Blender's* cash to spend however they please, Muse decide to buy a bunch of alien costumes and a giant inflatable castle and throw a concert after-party in the middle of the Mojave Desert. At 2:30 A.M. For 15 people. What might better explain this decision, though, is the \$150 worth of psychedelic mushrooms—not *Blender*-financed, in case the secret government is curious—that the band will ingest shortly before arriving at their helium château. They aim to create as mind-blowing a trip as they can: "You wanna see something you've never seen before," Bellamy explains.

Muse, who are touring to support their acclaimed concept album *Black Holes & Revelations*, insist that they don't do hallucinogenic drugs very often. Howard says that since mushrooms grow in the forests of Muse's native southwest England, they've "done quite a bit" but "not for years." Anyone who has seen the fantastic six-minute video for their single "Knights of Cydonia," though, could be forgiven for suspecting otherwise: The clip juxtaposes kung fu fighting, laser guns, hotties on unicorns and Wild West showdowns (and proves in the process that for all their weighty preoccupations, Muse have a damn good sense of humor, too).

The first stop of the night is Halloween Mart, a costume emporium. "We're going for a soft-core pornographic, Area 51 vibe," Bellamy says as he and his bandmates fan through the aisles. Highest on the shopping list: bug-eyed-alien masks and—for the ladies they've invited to join their des-

ert party—saucer-shaped sparkly miniskirts that Judy Jetson might wear for a night of turning tricks.

The purity of Bellamy's futuristic vision is lost, however, once the band sets eyes on the variety of costumes for sale: medieval wenches, evil clowns, a giant hand that fits over one's torso ... "I didn't realize this place was going to be so extensive," Wolstenholme says, thumbing a French-maid getup. He scoops up a litter of fake mustaches while Howard snags a Spider-Man costume—"I've always wanted one of these"—and Bellamy slides on a glittering pirate mask, a bit Jack Sparrow, a bit Liberace. Ample stocked, they race back to the Hard Rock for their show.

The shroomstravaganza reconvenes at 2 A.M. in the Hard Rock lobby. We're joined by two chatty raven-haired girls whom no one in the band seems to know particularly well and by the girls of the Like, the L.A. trio that's touring with Muse. Muse's publicist informs us that everyone is "totally tripping," and indeed, the spirits are high. "The mushrooms are like an old friend," Howard says. "Haven't seen 'em in a while, but they're always welcome." Beaming a permanent smile, Wolstenholme chugs from a beer, hoists his bottle high and shouts, "Let's go!"

The bouncy castle—red, yellow and blue—has been installed a half-hour drive out from Vegas, illuminated by giant lights and surrounded by boulders, tumbleweeds and, in the distance, a red-rock formation barely perceptible in the dark. Any trucker whizzing past on nearby Route 15 who sees the squad of revelers—dressed in Barbarella suits, *Kill Bill* suits, alien suits, clown suits, giant hand suits and, for raven-haired girl No. 1, a revealing Little Bo Peep-style getup—might think he's seen a mirage.

Everyone kicks off their shoes, scampers into the castle and proceeds to jump up and down and shriek with glee for about 15 minutes nonstop. The air is thick with streamers, Silly String and tripper-speak. "It's like space in here," Howard says. "There's no ... no ... no concept of gravity." Taking a break from jumping, he stares out into the black, lost in deep concentration. Finally he announces, "I'm going to go run in those bushes," and disappears. Bellamy says something about how "situational psychology is so much more important than people think." Wolstenholme just grins and tries, unsuccessfully, to keep his balance.

Things only get less coherent. Bellamy and the Like's Charlotte Froom run around the castle with sheets of paper towel rolling out behind them. Bo Peep keeps flashing her thong. Howard, back from his bush run, materializes on top of a giant rusty tractor waving two road flares in the air. "Are these going to explode?" he asks.

By 5 A.M., we've reached the mellow 1-love-you-man stage of the party. People circle slowly, searching for their shoes. A note of reflection creeps into Bellamy's voice as he looks back on the night—a dinner full of conspiracy theories, a concert devoted to the theme of impending doom, an after-party of 'shrooms. "We take life seriously," he says, picking prickly tumbleweed bits from his palms. "But life's too short to take too seriously. That's where bouncy castles come in." [BLENDER]

"MUSHROOMS ARE LIKE AN OLD FRIEND."



HOW THEY SPENT IT

MUSE

LAS VEGAS, SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

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SHIRT BY BARNEYS NY. TIE
BY JAY KOS. SUNGLASSES BY
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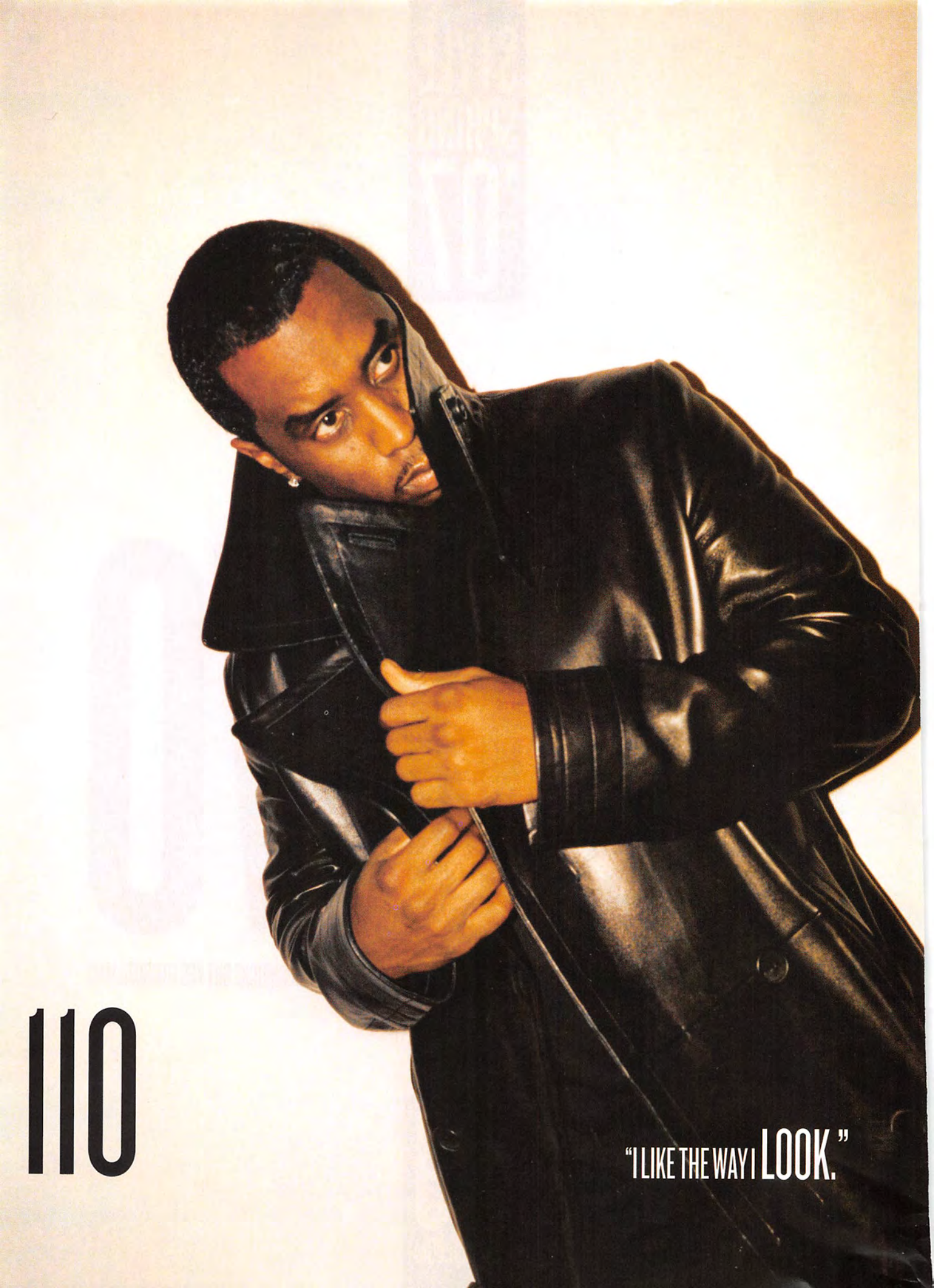
STYLE
SPRING
'07

ILL DIVO

IN THIS PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST AS FASHION IMPRESARIO, **DIDDY** SAYS NO TO BANANA HAMMOCKS BUT YES TO BROZILIANS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAGNUS UNNAR

109
BLENDER.COM



110

"I LIKE THE WAY I LOOK."



THIS PAGE:
JACKET BY GUCCI. SWEATER
BY POLO RALPH LAUREN.
SUNGLASSES BY SEAN JOHN.

OPPOSITE:
JACKET BY DOLCE & GABBANA.

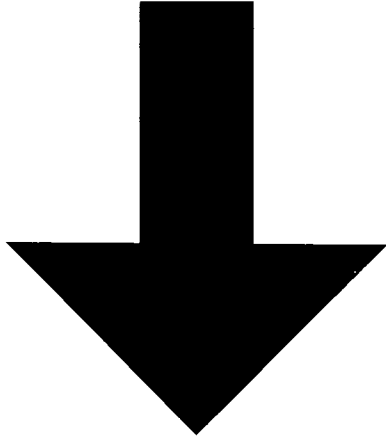


"I DON'T LEAVE THE UNITED STATES WITH LESS THAN 30 BAGS."





SWEATER JACKET BY GUCCI.
PANTS BY MARC JACOBS.
SHOES BY PRADA. SUNGLASSES
BY CHRISTIAN DIOR.



So, Diddy, who are you wearing right now?

Sean John. I've got on a black suede bomber, a black turtleneck, black corduroys and some black boots.

In three words, describe your style.

Swagger. Timeless. Diverse.

How many man-servants do you have handling your wardrobe at any given moment?

I don't really like to call them "man-servants." I don't know what racist white man came up with that.

Sorry. How many assistants do you have handling your wardrobe at any given moment?

Two. I have one full-time person who just files everything and keeps an inventory.

OK, say you're off to St. Tropez for a weekend. How many bags are you bringing?

I'm an over-packer. I don't leave the United States with less than 30 bags.

How many ties do you own?

Probably, like, a thousand.

Fur: murder or awesome?

I don't have a problem with fur, but I have gotten an education on it, and to be honest, I wear less than I did. PETA has had an effect on me. If you look at a lot of Sean John stuff, we have gone to faux fur. I am not saying that we won't do fur, but if we do, we will make sure the animal wasn't tortured.

What's one thing you will never wear?

You won't catch me wearing no nose ring. Or a Speedo.

Ever get a Brazilian wax?

Oh, yeah, definitely. I shave down there. I do it myself—or I have my young lady help me, because I don't want to get no nicks.

What's the slobbiest thing about you?

No matter where I'm at, I don't hang up my clothes. I'm a nightmare for my maid. I don't mean no disrespect or nothing, but I just always been like that, ever since I was a kid.

When's the last time you did your own laundry?

Back in, like, 1990.

What was the first nice piece of clothing you ever bought?

When I was 12, my mother bought me a \$300 leather bomber. I begged her for it. Kids who wore them were getting robbed for them because they were kind of expensive.

How many times do you wear a pair of sneakers before you won't wear them anymore?

Twice. Unless they are black—then I will wear them a little bit more.

Say you spill Cristal on your suit. Do you send it to the dry cleaner or throw it out?

I give it to the dry cleaner. I ain't crazy.

Why do you wear sunglasses all the time?

If you look in my eyes, you know what time it is, you know what's going on with me, you see my soul. And not everyone should see that. Also, it makes me look cool.

What are your personal-makeover goals?

I think I could put some more color in my wardrobe. Sometimes I get a little bit safe with colors and I stick with what I'm comfortable with.

What's a daring color for you?

Red. Yeah, red is down for me.

Who's the best-dressed chick in the game?

I like Posh Spice. I like the chances that she takes. She always looks put-together. She ain't no trend follower. A lot of the Hollywood girls, they all have the same stylist. They have the hottest bags, but they're not necessarily setting the trend.

Would you ever get Botox or cosmetic surgery?

I don't like when people fuck up their face with plastic surgery. I would be too scared to have it. If you wanna take care of a little thing here and there, more power to you. But I'm not fucking up my face. I like the way I look.

What's a good color suit for a court appearance?

You want to look handsome. A light gray is nice. You want to show some power, but you don't want people to feel intimidated by you.

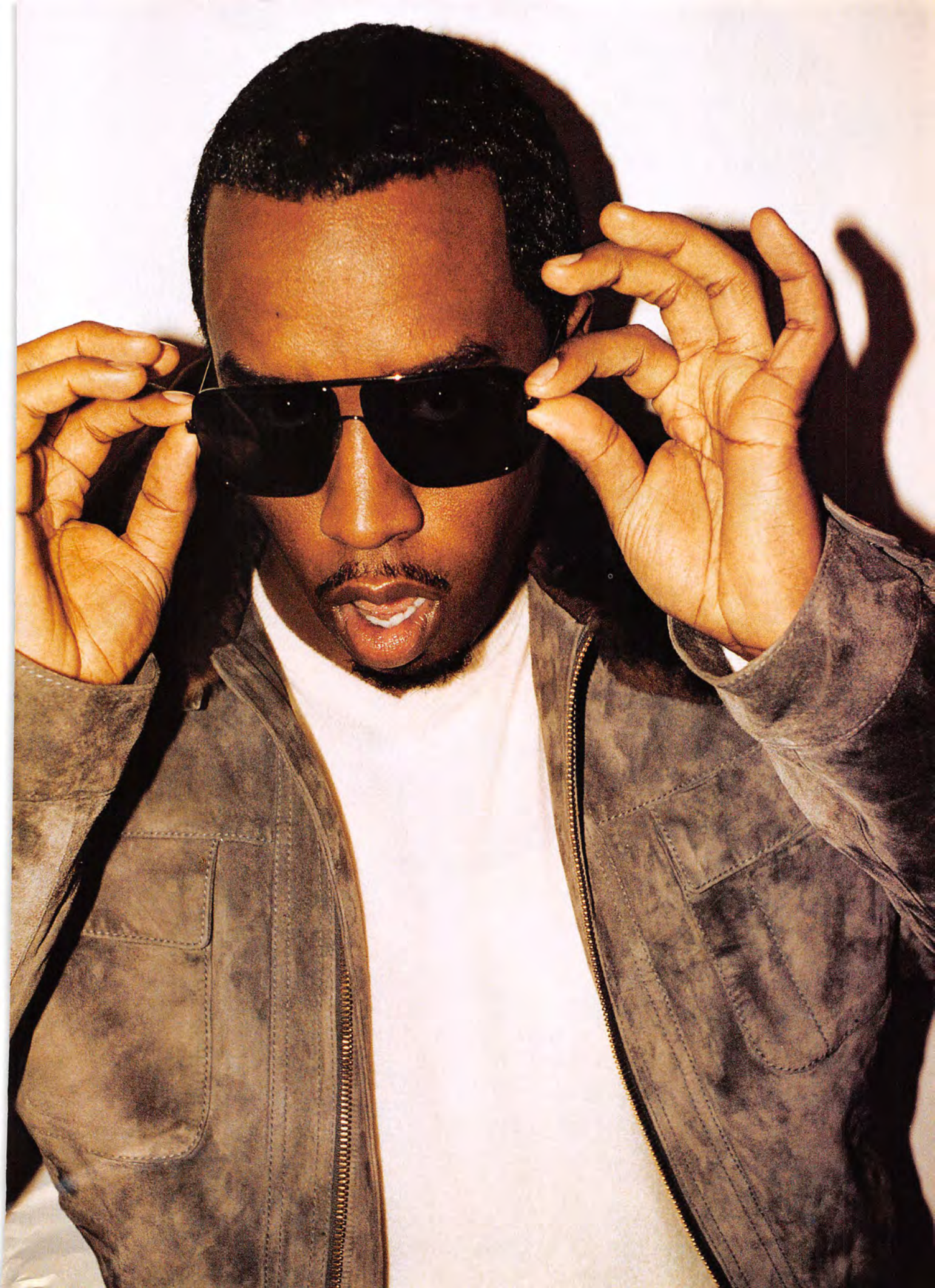
What did you do with all your shiny suits?

They're in my closet. I may bring them out if I need to. I'll bring them back out on these motherfuckers. I don't give a fuck. I don't have no problem giving people something to feel good about. VICTORIA DE SILVERIO



OPPOSITE:

JACKET BY GUCCI. SWEATER BY POLO RALPH LAUREN.
SUNGLASSES BY SEAN JOHN.





CARDIGAN BY LOUIS VUITTON.
V-NECK BY POLO RALPH
LAUREN. PANTS BY MARC BY
MARC JACOBS. BOOTS BY JOHN
VARVATOS. SUNGLASSES BY
SEAN JOHN.

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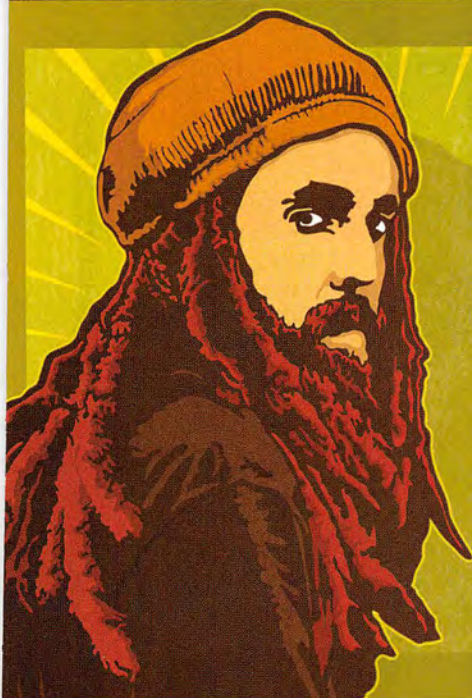
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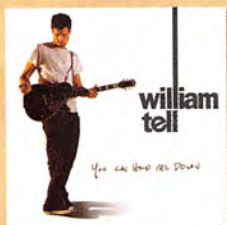
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STYLE
SPRING
'07

HE INVENTED THE BATHROBE

HEATHER COCKS AND JESSICA MORGAN, THE SNARKY FASHION COPS BEHIND GOFUGYOURSELF.COM, CAST AN EYE TOWARD SOME OF DIDDY'S MORE "CREATIVE" GETUPS THROUGHOUT THE YEARS



(1995)

WAIT—DIDDY KNEW BIGGIE SMALLS? HUH. TOGETHER AT THE MTV VIDEO MUSIC AWARDS IN NEW YORK

The Fugs say:

"The bad news is, we're pretty sure Versace co-opted this particular pattern for its line of housewares. The good news is, Diddy is unlikely to be hit by a car or lost in a crowd."



(1997)

THE DIDDY MEETS THE DONALD AT THE OPENING OF COMBS'S RESTAURANT, JUSTIN'S

The Fugs say:

"They have a lot in common: Both love the ladies, expensive suits, money and themselves. They're each other's perfect wingman."



(1997)

THE RISING MOGUL SHOWS SIGNS OF FATIGUE, WITH MASE AT THE BILLBOARD MUSIC AWARDS IN LAS VEGAS

The Fugs say:

"This is from his coy phase. He didn't want to be seen. However, whoever told him it was a jungle out there on the red carpet was speaking in metaphor."



(1998)

SHINY, HAPPY PUFFY DANCING DURING THE NO WAY OUT TOUR

The Fugs say:

"This is one step up from those aluminum-foil tracksuits wrestlers work out in when they're frantically trying to lose a few pounds. Shouldn't Diddy look cooler than your run-of-the-mill manorexic?"



(2003)

HELLO, SAILOR! DIDDY ON HIS YACHT IN ST. TROPEZ

The Fugs say:

"This is the Diddy we're accustomed to: chilling on the yacht, sporting the bling, talking on the phone. (We presume the robe is lined in chinchilla.) Diddy could probably wear his jammies everywhere, like a latter-day Hugh Hefner, only less gross."



(2002)

DIDDY GIVES HEIDI KLUM'S HALLOWEEN PARTY THE ROYAL TREATMENT

The Fugs say:

"We have to admit: The world would be a more interesting place if Sean Puffy Puff-Daddy P. Diddy Combs were our cognac-swilling pope-monarch. But it's possible he was just promoting a special Sexy Whopper for Burger King."



(1999)

DIDDY MAKES THE GRAMMY SCENE IN ALL WHITE, EVEN THOUGH IT'S MONTHS AFTER LABOR DAY

The Fugs say:

"This may have been a tactical mistake, as it probably got very annoying when half the presenters tried to snort him before going onstage."



(1999)

BEFORE THERE WAS BENNIFER, THERE WAS LOPUFF, AT THE MTV VIDEO MUSIC AWARDS IN NEW YORK

The Fugs say:

"This is the badass who turned Jennifer Lopez into a gun moll? Tucking a translucent, silky sleeveless shirt into pleather pants is about as gangsta as a pocket protector."

Love thy Sneaker



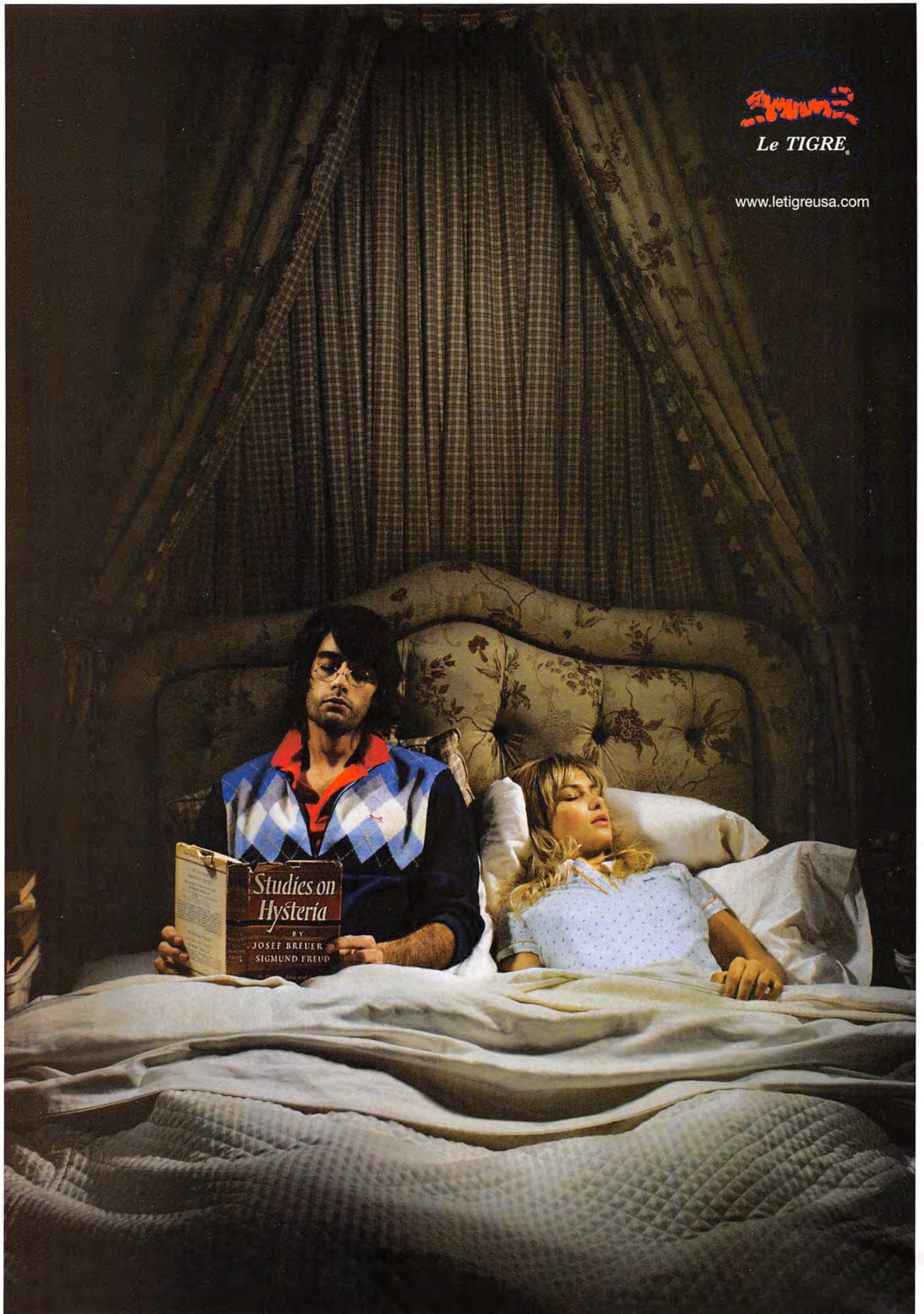
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THE ULTIMATE
TOURNAMENT!

ROCK STAR WARS

Only eight contenders remain in our quest to crown rock & roll's best act ever. Who better to help *Blender* judge these quarter-final slugfests than Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, the Roots drummer and record nerd par excellence? Gloves up, gentlemen, and keep it (moderately) clean ...

(By Jon Dolan and Douglas Wolk)

FINAL

4

TURN PAGE AND LIFT FLAP FOR FULL TOURNEY BREAKDOWN!



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ROCK STAR WARS

FINAL

4

NEXT
MONTH:
CHAMPIONSHIP
PREVIEW

WORDS

(ELITE 8 RESULTS)

I
BOB DYLAN
(1966)

(VS.)

II
PUBLIC ENEMY
(1990)

JON DOLAN: Here we have two really angry dudes. Dylan was mad at folkies, duplicitous women and people who wouldn't get stoned. Chuck D was mad at the media, duplicitous white corporate oppressors and people who liked Elvis more than James Brown.

DOUGLAS WOLK: No foolin'. Dylan had already been through his political phase, so by '66, he was just pissed at anyone who thought they could tell him what he was. Chuck's got a way better voice than Bob, and the Bomb Squad is on his side; weirdly enough, though, Public Enemy's focused rage and laser-sighted specificity of meaning might backfire on them in this bout.

AHMIR "QUESTLOVE" THOMPSON: Both PE and Dylan used "electric music" to shock and revolutionize. Both had head-scratching periods (*Self Portrait*, *Flavor of Love*). But only Dylan has music 40 years old that remains fresh; PE's landscape has been all but shifted on by contemporary hip-hop. So

on influence alone, Dylan gets the edge.

JON: You don't sit down and listen to influence, though. What about the records themselves? Dylan's '66 classic *Blonde on Blonde*, is an example of a guy way more interested in his mind's workings than in what the world thinks of them. PE's classic of 1990, *Fear of a Black Planet*, is the exact opposite, a record that tries to embody every political controversy of its time. Usually, that means sounding dated, but PE's noise transcends its topicality.

QUESTLOVE: Bottom line: It's close, but let's look at their angriest ammo: "Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos" vs. "Masters of War." Both were antiwar tirades, but Chuck loses a point 'cause black people are *never* supposed to read anything "letter from the government." Dylan puts his oppressors six feet deep and J. Edgar Hoover raised nary a finger. White privilege at its finest!



AND THE WINNER IS: **BOB DYLAN**

RIFFS

(ELITE 8 RESULTS)

2
LED ZEPPELIN
(1973)

(VS.)

4
PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION
(1984)

DOUGLAS: You can't pull off some of the bizarre, amazing stuff either of these bands did unless you're absolutely, totally positive that you're the best band in the world. Zep tell us, "It's not as hard as it seems," but they always make it seem like they're straining mighty hard. So I have to give Prince the edge here for making *Purple Rain* sound so easy he had even more hits to give away that year: Sheila E's "The Glamorous Life," Sheena Easton's "Sugar Walls."

JON: I dunno. Sometimes I think Prince is going to throw his back out during the solo on "Purple Rain." Certainly, Robert Plant worked too hard at being a "golden god," but I just YouTube'd Zep doing "The Ocean" in 1973, and for a drummer who ruled so severely, did John Bonham ever break a sweat?

DOUGLAS: It's true that Zep fucking rules and a half—I think you can actually buy vials of preserved Bonzo sweat on RockReliquary.com

—and they had a pretty impressive range of awesome stuff, too. But if you put *Houses of the Holy* on at a party, some people punch the air and other people wince. Put *Purple Rain* on and everybody dances and starts making out.

JON: Certainly, if you grew up in the '80s and didn't make out to *Purple Rain*, you are now either a very bitter adult or a tech billionaire.

QUESTLOVE: I came from one of them chu'ches in which all popular music was thought to be satanic. On one particular night, they played "Darling Nikki" forward and backward sideways—every which way but loose. I mean, the last place I expected to hear Nikki in the "hotel lobby masturbating" was in church. The next day my crew and I all copped *Purple Rain*. Now that's shit is gangsta!



AND THE WINNER IS: **PRINCE**

BRING THE GODS BACK DOWN TO EARTH

The epic journey continues as Kratos, once again driven by rage and revenge, crawls back from the depths of Hades to battle against Greek mythology's wickedest. Now he must do what no mortal has done before: change his fate and bring down the gods once and for all.



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GROOVES

(ELITE 8 RESULTS)

2

ELVIS PRESLEY

(1956)

(VS.)

5

TALKING HEADS

(1980)

JON: David Byrne and Elvis had two of the greatest overheated-white-guy voices in pop history. Elvis's sounded like he was getting psyched and nervous for a first date. Byrne's suggested a neurotic accountant who'd just discovered the meaning of life in the pocket of one of his big suits. Both could shake and jitter like they were getting electrocuted. People did not put statues of Byrne in their yard, though. Does the King get the nod?

DOUGLAS: All the records Elvis liked prefigured him. He didn't care about rock & roll as such—he cared about Elvis, and he transformed everything he'd absorbed, so that other people would care about Elvis, too. Byrne's an art guy—he transformed everything he'd absorbed, not all of which was music, so that other people would be perplexed and amazed. He's a vessel, not the product.

?UESTLOVE: Elvis was a hero to most, but the Talking Heads gave the '80s the best bass lines in rock. Not to mention they hipped us to Fela Kuti

and reintroduced Shuggie Otis to the new millennium. Sorry, Hound, I'm all about the underdog here.

JON: But Elvis introduced us to the banana-and-peanut-butter sandwich, gobbled down with a side order of Quaaludes. Your mention of some of Byrne's musical finds gets right to the heart of what's up for grabs in this fight: taste vs. trash. Even the '50s Elvis was a tawdry, greasy dirtbag. Byrne might be the classiest, most musically correct guy ever.

DOUGLAS: It's not like Talking Heads were snobs, though—they got hip by aiming at hips. It's gross and trashy and fun and sexy vs. smart and elegant and fun and sexy.

?UESTLOVE: Hmmm, this is very red state vs. blue state. But my heart is with the progressive pretentious. And I'd never be caught dead eating a greasy peanut-butter samich.



AND THE WINNER IS: **TALKING HEADS**

TUNES

(ELITE 8 RESULTS)

1

THE BEATLES

(1964)

(VS.)

2

NIRVANA

(1991)

DOUGLAS: Let's go over the Beatles' '64 landscape again: They had 14 of the Top 100 singles in one week, including all of the Top 5. Three No. 1 albums in the same year, 40 percent of the population of the U.S. watching their first appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. *A Hard Day's Night*, where all they had to do was show up and that made it a great movie. By comparison, Nirvana '91 is just a support system for track 1 of *Nevermind*, and I'm saying that as somebody whose life was changed by it.

JON: That's the thing. You could argue that the Beatles invented rock. You could also argue Nirvana saved it. I'm not sure which is harder. The Beatles did their magic in the '60s, when everything seemed possible. Nirvana did theirs in 1991, when nothing seemed possible.

?UESTLOVE: Let's get down to brass taxes here: 1) Moptops vs. Flannel Shirts—I'll go with the shirts; hip-hopsters embraced this style, too. 2) Yoko vs. Courtney—I like Court's

music a little bit better than Yoko's. 3) The Fade-out vs. Suicide—yeah, I know this is taboo. But you know and I know that Cobain's exit strategy is more legendary than letting Phil Spector shizznit on your swan song. Plus, all that *Nevermind* loot enabled my band to get a contract with Geffen in 1993. And the Beatles rejected my "Hey Bulldog" sample request 10 years later. So Nirvana take this close race by the skin of their fleece.

DOUGLAS: If we're gonna stick to the target year, though, it swings back to the Beatles again—everything seemed possible in 1964, but that's only because they made it possible. And one great thing about them is that they didn't reject the other pop of their formative years, the way Nirvana defined themselves in opposition to bad hair metal and Michael Jackson: The Beatles weren't haters. They loved it all.



AND THE WINNER IS: **THE BEATLES**

(1970) JAMES BROWN

(2000) BRITNEY SPEARS

(1989) BEASTIE BOYS

(2000) RADIOHEAD

(2000) OUTKAST

(2004) KANYE WEST

(1980) TALKING HEADS

(1979) CHIC

(1977) PARLIAMENT/FUNKADELIC

(1975) GRATEFUL DEAD

(1969) THE VELVET UNDERGROUND

(1983) NEW ORDER

(1969) SLY & THE FAMILY STONE

(1989) DE LA SOUL

(1956) ELVIS PRESLEY

(2001) MISSY ELLIOTT

(FIRST ROUND)

(1964) THE BEATLES

(1978) KISS

(1977) RAMONES

(1972) DAVID BOWIE

(1981) MICHAEL JACKSON

(1965) THE SUPREMES

(1985) MADONNA

(1966) THE BEACH BOYS

(1972) STEVIE WONDER

(1974) ROXY MUSIC

(1967) ARETHA FRANKLIN

EDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

(1972) AL GREEN

(1977) FLEETWOOD MAC

(1991) NIRVANA

(2004) GREEN DAY

(CHAMPIONSHIP)

"I AM A GOLDEN GOD!"

TALKING HEADS (1980)
vs.
THE BEATLES (1964)

Fifth-seed Talking Heads have had lucky breaks so far, but now they're up against a team that matches a lot of their secret weapons. David Byrne and John Lennon are both art-school-educated conceptualists, and arguably the two best rhythm-guitar players in rock. Both of their bands boast crazy-hot production, smart ideas lifted from overseas black pop, killer album covers, radio formats built around their album cuts as well as their singles, and really great outfits and haircuts—and the Beatles are, well, the Beatles. The Heads' Hail Mary play could be to recast this contest as a dance-off.

FINAL FOUR PREVIEW

3 TALKING HEADS

5 TALKING HEADS

2 ELVIS PRESLEY

1 THE BEATLES

1 THE BEATLES

2 NIRVANA

1 JAMES BROWN

5 TALKING HEADS

3 PARLIAMENT/FUNKADELIC

12 ELVIS PRESLEY

1 THE BEATLES

5 MADONNA

6 ARETHA FRANKLIN

2 NIRVANA

1 JAMES BROWN

9 RADIOHEAD

13 KANYE WEST

5 TALKING HEADS

3 PARLIAMENT/FUNKADELIC

11 NEW ORDER

7 SLY & THE FAMILY STONE

3 ELVIS PRESLEY

1 THE BEATLES

8 RAMONES

3 MICHAEL JACKSON

5 MADONNA

3 STEVIE WONDER

6 ARETHA FRANKLIN

10 FLEETWOOD MAC

2 NIRVANA

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11 (1969) CF
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*Radio & Records.com,
March 27, 2006*

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**MARY J. BLIGE**

Hip-hop's alpha singer gets a retrospective loaded with misery, hope and anti-hateration.

★★★★

**FALL OUT BOY**

Rock out with your cock ... in, please. The emo lords return with a third set.

★★★★½

**DIANA ROSS**

Just in time for Valentine's Day, an album of ballads that make love sound borrrring.

★★

THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM

Lily Allen: "I can eat cereal out of my hairdo!"

RARE BIRD

A RAZOR-TONGUED LONDON GAL WITH STRONG OPINIONS ABOUT KATE MOSS AND PREMATURE EJACULATION

LILY ALLEN

ALRIGHT, STILL ★★★★★½

CAPITOL

POP DIVAS EXIST to make our tiny lives seem even smaller. They live in space castles and eat foie gras with diamond spoons. *We're* happy when we find a Cheeto between the couch cushions. British star Lily Allen has serious diva potential: Her songs top the U.K. charts; her drug habits make the tabloids; the paparazzi haunt her path. Yet she never got the memo that says it's a star's job to be untouchably cool. Like Kelly Clarkson at her most *gosh-g'all* sweet or the "Just a Girl"-era Gwen Stefani, lil' Lil exudes a heart-on-sleeve gawkiness and →

gum-snapping giddiness, ungainly impulses imperious pop princesses hope to squash before that first audition. She's not just a pop queen, she's a pal—or, more impressively, a pop queen because she'd make such a great pal.

This English star hits our shores a fully formed mess. A child of showbiz privilege (her mom, Alison Owen, is a movie producer; her dad, Keith, is a hip comic actor), she attended more than a dozen boarding schools, met her first manager at 15 while selling Ecstasy in Ibiza and signed her first recording contract at 20. Nothing came of that 2005 deal, but *Alright, Still*, recorded mainly with production duo Future Cut, went gold in England shortly after being released last summer, a triumph that has yet to afford Allen an opportunity to move out of her mom's house.

Despite being kinda glamorous, she's so little-sisterly you want to give her a noogie. Her fave things include classic Nikes and hip-hop and stickers and flowers, and her boy issues know no end. On *Alright's* reggae-tinged first single, "Smile," she deploys a sugary melody as a Trojan horse for a smackdown on a douche-bag ex-boyfriend. On the forlorn single "Littlest Things," she writes about relationship terror with white-knuckled worry over a snip of florid piano from a '70s soft-core porn flick.

Oh, yeah, and she blogs—man, does she blog. Most artists have a MySpace page; Lily Allen *is* a MySpace page, fusing the truth-spitting honesty of a mix-tape-strafting MC, the loopy exuberance of a raver and the why-me? introspection of a TV-drama everyteen. A blog entry called "Slightly Depressed" offered, "I've split up with my boyfriend. This should be the happiest time in my life but to

be honest, I feel alone and lost and find myself crying uncontrollably." A post from last year about a TV appearance with rising U.K. rock act the Kooks was titled simply, "Twats."

What's amazing about *Alright, Still* is how similar the girl with the blog is to the girl with the hit record. On the buoyant "Not Big," Allen outs an ex's premature ejaculation and promises to "work my way through your mates," only to admit she's "acting mental" because he dumped her. In the moodier "Friend of Mine," she calls out a two-faced girlfriend with as much pain in her voice as daring. Allen can chirpily flow over supple '60s ska or New Orleans Mardi Gras boogie or Caribbean groove like she's rocking in the mirror with a hairbrush microphone, trying on each sound like a party dress she'll probably wear only once. This mix of panache and self-doubt, courage and chaos, merges best on songs where she injects shots of irony into otherwise-slick pop confections. Using the kind of Swinging London tune that promised a generation of miniskirted secretaries endless good times, "Everything's Just Wonderful" uncorks an essay on negative body image: "All the magazines, they talk about weight loss/If I buy those jeans I can look like Kate Moss," she sings. No wonder she has nearly 100,000 MySpace friends.

Whether poking fun at her stoner little brother (whom she lives with) on the silly waltz-rap "Alfie" or calling out nasty blokes in the dating-bar vérité "Knock 'Em Out," Allen casually and wittily blurs the line between fan and friend. And if the 40-minute length of *Alright, Still* seems a touch short, it's ideal for a special episode of her real world.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: "Smile," "Not Big," "Littlest Things"

TALES FROM THE STUDIO

LILY ALLEN ON THE MAKING OF *ALRIGHT, STILL*

WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENED

"Manchester, Los Angeles and New York. I'd been recording in London, but I had too many distracting friends: Going out and getting drunk all the time isn't great for the creative juices! So I persuaded the record company to let me try some new places."

THE ALBUM IS A CROSS BETWEEN _____ AND _____
"Blondie and Shaun Ryder."

AMBITIOUS IDEA YOU COULDN'T QUITE PULL OFF

"Let me see. We wanted an orchestra of barking seals. [Laughs] They just wouldn't do what they were told."

THE HATERS WILL SAY

"The girl can't keep her mouth shut. There are a lot of words on the album..."

THE MONEY SPENT MAKING THIS ALBUM COULD BUY...

"How much does a Mercedes cost? Half a Mercedes?"

STUDIO DEMANDS INCLUDE

"The walls must be purple, and I need scented candles—no, I'm just kidding. It's put-your-head-down-and-do-it, that's it."

SONG YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF

"Littlest Things." It shows more of myself. "Smile" shows my aggressive side, but this is my nicer side."

WHY SHOULD SOMEONE BUY THIS ALBUM?

"Cause it's brilliant, of course."

JONAH WEINER

Laughing at you,
not with you.



THE SCORE

★★★★★

CLASSIC

★★★★

GREAT

★★★

GOOD

★★

MEDIOCRE

★

FOUL

ANDREW BIRD

ARMCHAIR APOCRYPHA ★★☆☆

FAT POSSUM

And you thought that Decemberists dude used a lot of weird words...

Some smart guys take a technical approach to music. Violinist-guitarist Andrew Bird goes further, filling his richly ornamented yet understated alt-pop with allusions to actual lab work. His 10th album contains a rumba-tinged tune about romantic drift that rhymes *closeness* with *mitosis* (the biological process by which cell division forms new nuclei) and an orchestral-rock number that invokes a game of Operation to illustrate the author's shaky-handed existential condition. Bird, a Chicagoan who scraped the mainstream during the mid-'90s with neoswing act the Squirrel Nut Zippers, yokes his impeccable chops and supple mumble to quiescent arrangements a Wilco fan could chin-scratch along with. Still, the music's intellectualism obscures as many truths as it unveils: Rarely has the term *drop some science* been more apt.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: "Imitosis," "Scythian Empire"

THE BIRD AND THE BEE

THE BIRD AND THE BEE

★★★★½

METRO BLUE/BLUE NOTE

A SoCal Holly Golightly for the sunny-cheery, on-the-verge-of-a-nervous-breakdown crowd

When Inara George's psychotic episode finally hits, it's going to be a doozy. As half of this L.A. pop-electronica duo, she exudes cocktail sophistication: Her voice glides through bossa nova *la-las* and waltzing *why-oh-whys*, alternating between blissful and weary detachment. Keyboardist Greg Kurstin cushions her with home-studio homages to late-'60s movie soundtracks and the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*; programmed beats and space sounds offset acoustic guitar, tambourine, →

CASE OF THE CLAP

AMERICA'S MOST INDEPENDENT BAND STRAINS TO BE HEARD OVER ITS OWN BUZZ

CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH

SOME LOUD THUNDER ♂♂½

CLAP YOUR HANDS SAY YEAH

"ALL THIS TALKING/You'd think I'd have something to say," Alec Ounsworth muses at the beginning of his band's second album. The talk about Clap Your Hands Say Yeah began with tastemaking Web site Pitchfork's rapturous review of the Brooklyn- and Philly-based alt-rock quintet's first, self-released CD in late 2005; subsequently, the band sold over 150,000 copies of it without a record label in the U.S., did even better in Europe and became the poster children for the future of the music business. So their (also label-less) follow-up is carrying an enormous symbolic burden, and they've apparently decided to anticipate and short-circuit the inevitable backlash by making it clear that they're unimpeachably independent-minded.

Some Loud Thunder is certainly uncompromising—which isn't the same thing as "good," although it's got a handful of very good moments. It's got deliberately cruddy-sounding recording in places (most successfully, the phlegmy drums that punctuate "Emily Jean Stock"); it's got reference points both cool (a song named after the 1970 film *Five Easy Pieces*) and so-uncool-they're-cool (the lyrics of "Love Song No. 7" acknowledge the music's debt to Supertramp's "Take the Long Way Home"); it's got ludicrously cryptic song titles ("Mama,

Won't You Keep Them Castles in the Air and Burning?"). Ounsworth plays up his voice's whining eccentricities even more than he did on the first album—his nerdy striving for high notes can't help but recall a young David Byrne, or Thom Yorke with severe sinus problems—although his singing is often unintelligibly deep in the mix, since clarity might count as a compromise.

Beneath all the defensive obfuscation, though, CYHSY actually are witty, inventive arrangers, delivering heaps of winning little instrumental details even when their hooks don't quite connect. They're not averse to fun, either, and the best and least mysterious song here is a cranked-up disco goof, "Satan Said Dance," in which it turns out Hell is one big nightclub: "No whips no chains/Just dancing dancing dancing dancing dancing ... " The band may even have something to say. Right now, though, they're being too careful to not let anyone know one way or the other.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "Satan Said Dance," "Emily Jean Stock"

ALEC OUNSWORTH'S CURRENT LISTENING

JOHN CALE
VINTAGE VIOLENCE COLUMBIA/LEGACY

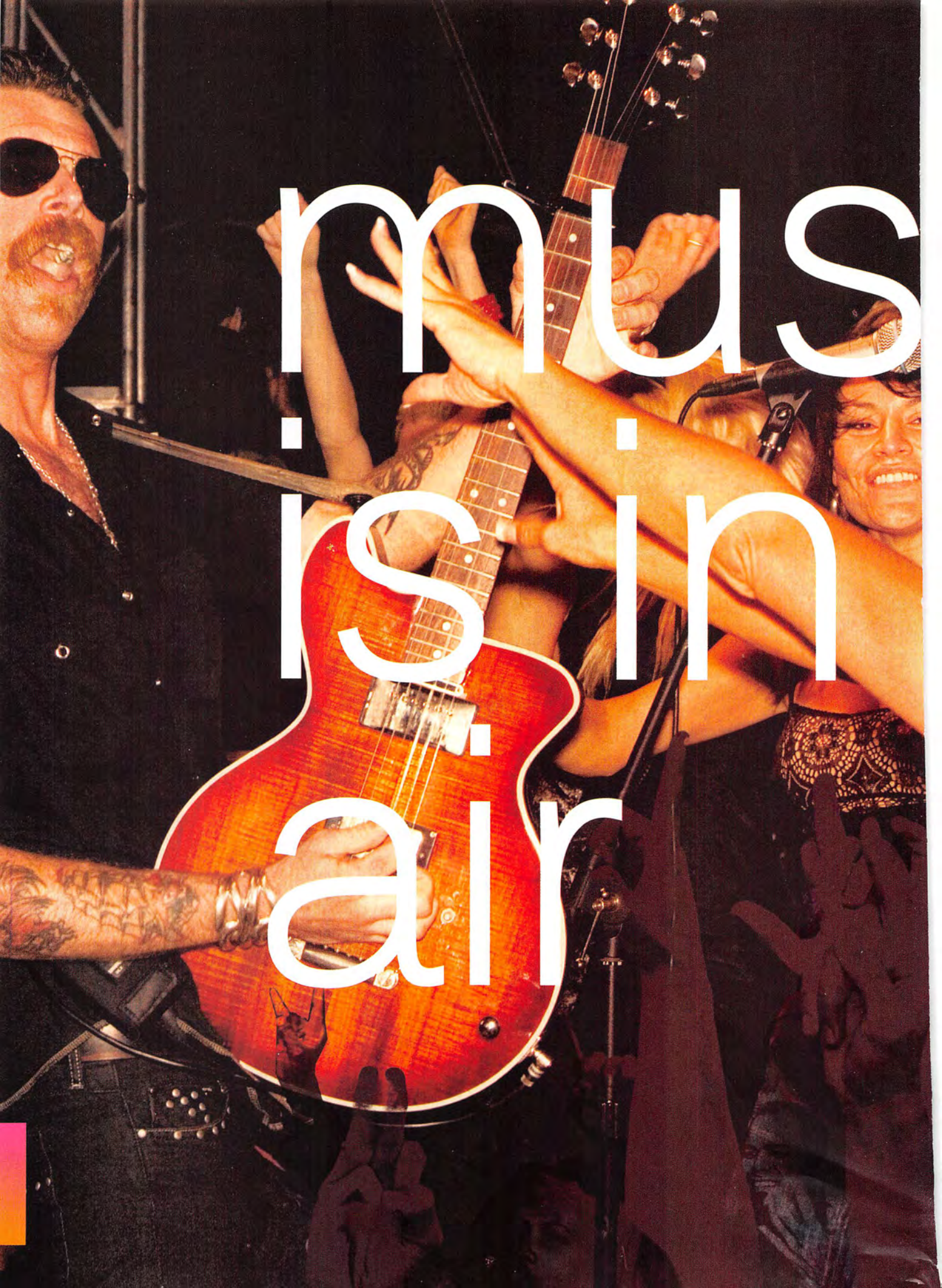
DUKE ELLINGTON
MONEY JUNGLE BLUE NOTE

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah model the Salvation Army's spring '07 collection.



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SC model shown.





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to the



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Fall Out Boy, or rejects from an episode of *Next?*

BOY TROUBLE

A FOLLOW-UP THAT HATES BACK AT HATERS

FALL OUT BOY

INFINITY ON HIGH ★★½

ISLAND

EMO
BEEF
ALERT!

FALL OUT BOY'S third CD opens with a typically defensive emo boast: "We dedicate this album to anybody who said we couldn't make it." But it's not Pete Wentz, the band's bass player and mouthpiece, doing the crowing, or even singer Patrick Stump. It's Jay-Z.

FOB may be poster boys for the whitest scene this side of a keytar convention, but they're also resolutely hip-hop—and not just because they party with Kanye West. On their 2005 smash, *From Under the Cork Tree*, the four Chicagoans came off like hungry MCs, proclaiming their greatness even while predicting a backlash. Now that they've been proven right—to the tune of 3 million albums and probably as many haters—they're responding like a rapper would: by indulging their persecution complex.

Wentz, the group's main lyricist, never met a metaphor he didn't like, and he fills these songs about gossip columns and blood-sucking sceneries with self-consciously clever pop-culture nods. Sometimes his self-flagellating confessionals—like "Hum Hallelujah," inspired by his O.D. on antianxiety pills—sound genuinely troubling, like he's one nasty blog comment away from shuffling off to that great Warped Tour in the sky. Other times they're merely ridiculous: The drearily overwrought "Golden" claims, "I saw God cry in the reflection of my enemies." Maybe one more Ativan wouldn't be such a bad idea after all.

While none of the new album's hooks match the taurine-mainlining rush of "Sugar, We're Goin Down," there's still lots to love. Stump roughs up his voice to a terrifically gritty ache, thanks perhaps to R&B maestro Babyface, who produced two tracks. On "The Take Over, the Breaks Over" he even displays some quasi-Motown soul—not bad for a guy who looks like Marcie from *Peanuts*. The band's at its best when sneering and reckless, like on the armor-plated single "This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race," where guitarist Joe Trohman deploys a slow-grind riff and Stump goes thermonuclear. It's almost gangsta.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race," "The Take Over, the Breaks Over"

horns and gongs. But every once in a while, George lets her angst flash out. "You give me almost nothing," she snaps in "F*cking Boyfriend." She loathes photographers even more: "Don't take my picture!" she hissy-fits in "I Hate Camera." This is 21st-century lounge with a Manson heart—music for unwinding, or maybe plotting crazed revenge.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD: "F*cking Boyfriend," "Again & Again"

BLOC PARTY

A WEEKEND IN THE CITY

★★★½

VICE

Buzzy Brits whip up more music for the freaked-out to get their freak on

On "Hunting for Witches," this punk foursome decries British paranoia about terrorism and immigration—like a caffeinated Radiohead, Bloc Party critique one climate of fear by creating their own. Trading the scattered punk yelps of their 2005 debut for a tenser, more focused Yorkean ambience, the band makes London sound like a prison: "It sucks the joy right out of me," Kele Okereke wails. His lyrics are too often sophomoric or prosaic ("Waiting for the 7.18" makes rock's first, and hopefully last, Sudoku reference), but the band's questing art rock is plenty eloquent, riding arena-band vapor trails on "Sunday," swooning like Sigur Rós on "SRXT" and getting politely crunked up on "The Prayer." The standout is "Where Is Home?," a disjointed, drum-heavy explosion of racial angst (Okereke is black). At Bloc Party's best, music and message collide with astounding force.

DORIAN LYNSEY

DOWNLOAD: "The Prayer," "Where Is Home?"

DEERHOOF

FRIEND OPPORTUNITY ★★★

KILL ROCK STARS/5RC

On album nine, San Francisco trio aims to be the cuddliest force in noise rock

Satomi Matsuzaki doesn't sing so much as *meep*. It's not merely that her voice is an airy chirp: The singer cultivates the manner of a toddler impersonating Pikachu, hitting a spot where cuteness gets annoying. Her band crashes around like a demolition crew taking down a toy store. Instrumentation and time signatures shift with unpredictable abandon, but the songs generally play in two modes: chipper or dreamy. At

worst, Matsuzaki's delivery can make this manic style-juggling sound irritating where it might otherwise be captivating. At best, she comes up with some gorgeously strange melodies and wordplay. "If I were man and you were dog/I'd throw a stick for you," she coos on "Kidz Are Small." Cutesy? She can't help it. But it's as endearing—and as unlikely—a devotional as you'll hear this year.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: "Kidz Are Small," "The Perfect Me"

THE DIVINE COMEDY

VICTORY FOR THE COMIC MUSE

★★★

EMI/CAROLINE

Wit, wonder and woodwind with the literary lion of British pop

A kind of musical version of *Masterpiece Theatre*, oak-paneled with strings, oboes and literary references, the Divine Comedy feel so plushly English that it's easy to forget driving force Neil Hannon is actually an Irishman. A bishop's son, Hannon makes symphonic pop that's meticulous, beautiful, refreshing and emphatically not rock & roll. Here he abandons recent dalliances with Radiohead's producer and fax-machine noises and returns to witty chamber pop, setting cellos and brass loose on songs about love, existentialist terrorism and the fear of dying a virgin. Jaunty it may be, but it's never twee—"A Lady of a Certain Age" is a vision of an aging society beauty would crack the coldest heart. This is music for the well-read rock fan and the would-be scoundrel. Pass the Grey Poupon!

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD: "To Die a Virgin," "A Lady of a Certain Age," "Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World"

DR. DOG

WE ALL BELONG ★★½

PARK THE VAN

Ramshackle Philly noisemakers return for more jamming, more drinking

Dr. Dog's songs are an amateurish mess, and the band would be the first to admit it. The Philadelphia fivesome specializes in raising a good-natured racket, bashing out classic-rock-referencing riffs that made its self-released debut (2005's *Easy Beat*) a blog favorite and earned the band spots opening for the Strokes and Raconteurs. This second album is a little slicker—in the same way a finger-painting is more polished than a cave drawing—but also lacks some of its predecessor's slapdash →

RING THE ALARM

GRAMMY QUEEN SURROUNDS HERSELF WITH PILLOWS

NORAH JONES

NOT TOO LATE ☼☼

BLUE NOTE

A NEW NORAH Jones record is a *Groundhog Day* experience: In track 1, she sounds as if she's just getting out of bed; in track 2, she's getting out of bed again; and on we go. But there's no subtext of sex or sullenness. She just seems to like being sleepy.

With her cottony voice and mildly interpersonal lyrics, she's a particular kind of sensualist: not an exciting one, but a comfortable one. If her mega-successful 2002 first album (10 million sales) seemed fluke, and her second (4 million) a wary effort to hew close to the debut, it's easier now to see what she's working with. This third album, produced by her bassist Lee Alexander, with songs written by Alexander and Jones, again dips into folk, blues, soul and country; again, the results are a mutant virus of gorgeous and bland, grainy and slick.

Jones projects a single mood, a remote idealization of semi-Southern blitheness, free of tremor and stress, even when she's alluding to a soldier leaving behind his girlfriend in "Wish I Could." The vibe of this cuddly-wuddly pajama party isn't anything she's gotten from her heroes, Willie Nelson, Ray Charles, Al Green or Bonnie Raitt; it's not risk or joy or self-actualization or perseverance. It's safety, which is just as powerful.



Norah Jones:
"Talking to you,
brick wall, is like
trying to talk to a
brick wall."

"Sinkin' Soon," with singing from M. Ward (a fellow traveler in drowsiness, but a more transcendent one) and a junkyard trombone solo, sounds like bantam-league Tom Waits; "Not My Friend" is subject to a wimpy lullaby melody; and "My Dear Country" nearly has an opinion about the president, but retreats.

Jones is so consistent that it's hard to split hairs, but she comes best in the title track—simple and pretty, with a spoonful of her underrated, murmuring piano—and in "Wake Me Up," a nearly weightless tune about, yes, wanting to drift off to sleep. They don't call her Snorah for nothing.

BEN RATLIFF

DOWNLOAD: "Wake Me Up"

JONES: DANNY CLINCH

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DON'T EAT THE BROWN ONES.



THE CURIOUSLY CHOCOLATE ALTOIDS™

curious? altoids.com

Caetano Veloso
applauds our
review.



THE CD WE'RE TOTALLY GAY FOR

CAETANO VELOSO

CÉ ★★★★★

NONESUCH

Brazil's songwriting king gets grayer, better

Sixtysomething Caetano Veloso is the Bob Dylan of Brazil—a sly and prophetic songwriting genius given to spurts of wild unpredictability. And like Dylan's, Veloso's late-career albums rank among the best he's ever recorded. Unlike the somber, candlelit ballads of 2004's all-covers *A Foreign Sound*, Veloso's latest (and by most counts his 40th) album is joyous and limber. He and his band alternate between scampering electric rave-ups ("Rocks") and delicate, folksy swoons (the mournful, view-from-a-plane "Minhas Lágrimas") that recall the cosmopolitan pop of his 1960s records. Throughout, Veloso's voice is a whimsical delight: He trembles his way through "Waly Salomão," strikes a lovelorn falsetto on "Deusa Urbana" and—in his finest moment of refusing to act his age—jokes about nose hairs and multiple orgasms on "Homem."

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD: "Homem," "Deusa Urbana," "Outro"

charm. Their weird song structures and beery, lo-fi rambles suggest Guided by Voices with a better rhythm section, while singers Scott McMicken and Toby Leaman veer from sweet Beach Boys harmonies to cracked, discordant yelping about moonshine-swilling donkeys and suicide by cigarettes. Maybe it makes more sense in a bar.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "Don't Pretend"

FIELD MUSIC

TONES OF TOWN ★★

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES

Cute indie-rock shut-ins need love, meds and less studio time

The retiring nice guys in this U.K. trio like their music the way they like their girls: pretty, weird and tricky to get a handle on. Multi-instrumentalist bros David and Peter Brewis's tales of romantic woe are as knotty as the Beatles-loving orchestral pop they and keyboardist Andrew Moore spool out above an ever-shifty rhythmic clatter. The elusive crushes they evoke in open-souled falsetto are a little less distant (one almost spends the night) than the untouchable lass who stalked the band's 2006 debut. But even when our breathlessly befuddled suitors get flat-out dumped, they can always hide out in their rich, psychosonic inner world—bad for their love lives, good for us.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: "A House Is Not a Home," "She Can Do What She Wants"

FUJIYA & MIYAGI

TRANSPARENT THINGS ★★½

DEAF DUMB & BLIND COMMUNICATIONS

English drone hustlers pretend to be Japanese and sound German—let's hear it for globalization!



"We were/just preten/ding to be/Japanese," David Best half-whispers over and over

on "Photocopier." From the title to the repeated confession, the song exemplifies a lot about this British trio's aesthetic: They're fascinated with rhythm, repetition and duplication, like early-'70s German experimental bands Neu! and Can, whose tones and techniques they borrow; and they have a pretty weird sense of humor, too. On this debut, lyrics function as either percussion or decoration; Best mutters odd phrases about sports injuries and "professional nonsmokers" as if they were mantras. So the band gets over on endlessly cycling, simple-sounding grooves—the

single-minded disco stomp of "In One Ear & Out the Other," the percolating autobahn drone of "Conductor 71"—that turn out, when you listen closely, to be mutating constantly.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: "In One Ear & Out the Other," "Ankle Injuries"

PATTY GRIFFIN

CHILDREN RUNNING THROUGH

★★★½

ATO

An answer to the question: Which songwriter has been covered by Dixie Chicks and Jessica Simpson?

Patty Griffin has a voice as cutting as a scalpel and a determination to slice life to the bone in her songwriting. Or as one title on her great new album announces, "I Don't Ever Give Up." The onetime New England folkie, now in her early 40s, displays the true grit of a younger Bonnie Raitt, and from folk funk ("Stay on the Ride") to folk punk ("Getting Ready") to country gospel ("Heavenly Day," "Up to the Mountain," "Crying Over"), she covers acres of territory with astonishing authority. In her classic country waltz "Trapeze," her alter ego is a circus performer who likes to live dangerously: "Some people don't care if they live or they die/Some people wanna know what it feels like to fly/They gather the courage and they give it a try." You could call her Tenacious P.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

DOWNLOAD: "Trapeze," "Heavenly Day," "I Don't Ever Give Up," "Stay on the Ride"

LIL SCRAPPY

BRED 2 DIE, BORN 2 LIVE ★★½

REPRISE

Head-bussin' crunk prodigy pairs malice with social comment

Lil Jon turns fight music into party music, embodying the eerie but ultimately harmless drawl-and-brawl aura of crunk. When Lil Scrappy, Jon's pet project, talks violence, you actually want to run for cover: His 2003 breakout hit, "Head Bussa," sounded and felt like a bat to the skull. On Scrappy's new album, he's at it again: "Gangsta, Gangsta" wrings unholy N.W.A. swagger from 808s, buzzing guitar stabs and haunted-house piano rolls, while Mammon jam "Money in the Bank" molds a corny catchphrase into a menacing chant. But things get even better when Scrappy unravels his tough-guy persona, attempting introspection and even social consciousness. The wistful "Livin' in the Projects" and Horatio Alger tale "Like Me" boast a dose-of-reality candor—and a glimpse at the agony beneath crunk's aggression.

ROQUE STREW

DOWNLOAD: "Gangsta, Gangsta," "Livin' in the Projects"

JOHN MELLENCAMP

FREEDOM'S ROAD ★★½

UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC

Hometown worries and political hokey from the Indiana rocker who shills for Chevy

Since introducing Jack & Diane, two American kids



I LOVE
THIS CD!

LUCY LIU
THE KILLERS
SAM'S TOWN
ISLAND

"I love their sound. It's raw but accomplished at the same time. I saw them in concert recently, and that made me like them even more."

SEA NOTE

OCEAN-OBSESSED INDIE VETS GO FISHING, LAND A BIG ONE

MODEST MOUSE

WE WERE DEAD BEFORE THE SHIP EVEN SANK ★★☆☆½

EPIC

ISAAC BROCK IS indie rock's high priest of aimlessness. Since 1996, the Modest Mouse frontman has turned disorientation into a guiding principle, rambles into epics and a general lack of purpose into a calling. With one of rock's most arresting voices—it veers from a gentle lisp to a canine array of yelps and barks—he specializes in images of grand futility: highways that loop back on themselves, buffalos hurling themselves from cliffs and, on 2004's crossover hit "Float On," bodies that bob along, helpless against the current.

But while Brock is aimless, he isn't lazy. He's a prolific songwriter, an inventive guitarist and a rigorous lyricist: Phrases in one song often echo those in another, making tracks seem like pieces of a bigger puzzle. Here, the water Brock treaded on "Float On" returns to swallow him: "We'll be crushed by the ocean," he intones. At the album's center is a story about no-luck sailors, a robbery and, improbably, a robotic messiah. It's no spoiler to say that everyone dies, because Brock's never been one for happy endings. For years, cars were the vehicle for his tales of alienation and regret; except for one prominent jalopy ("Dashboard"), his imagination here has gone to sea, a place where freedom runs up



"Next tour, can we spring for a second hotel room?"

against isolation, chaos and the random cruelty of the universe. It's a metaphor as old as Noah, but with Brock's fleet of compelling idiosyncrasies (Robo Jesus, anyone?), he makes it his own.

Significant credit goes to the band's new guitarist, former Smiths virtuoso Johnny Marr. Marr delivers guitar rock as exhilarating as it gets: His riffs tangle ("We've Got Everything"), rocket upward (the fantastic "Steaming Genius") and, on the gorgeous "Little Motel," shimmer and peal. And is there another "Float On"? It scarcely matters: 10 years into their career, Modest Mouse have stumbled into their best album yet.

JONAH WEINER

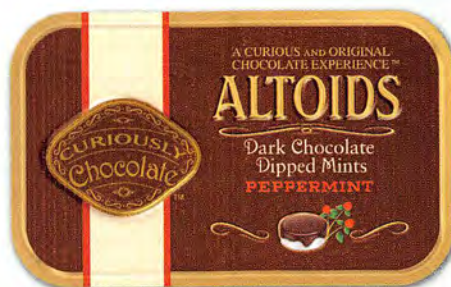
DOWNLOAD: "Steaming Genius," "Little Motel," "People We Knew"

MODEST MOUSE: AUTUMN DE WILDE

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CHOCOLATE BALLS



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It's been 30 years since 'The Last Waltz'
and the music lives on....

ENDLESS HIGHWAY

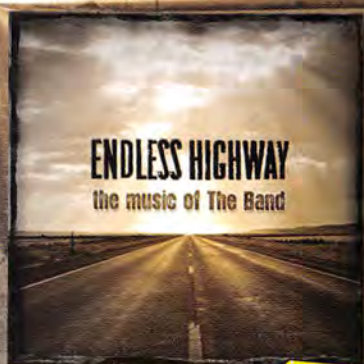
the music of The Band

FEATURING PERFORMANCES BY

JACK JOHNSON MY MORNING JACKET DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE
GUSTER GOMEZ JAKOB DYLAN WIDESPREAD PANIC
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- Robbie Robertson, The Band



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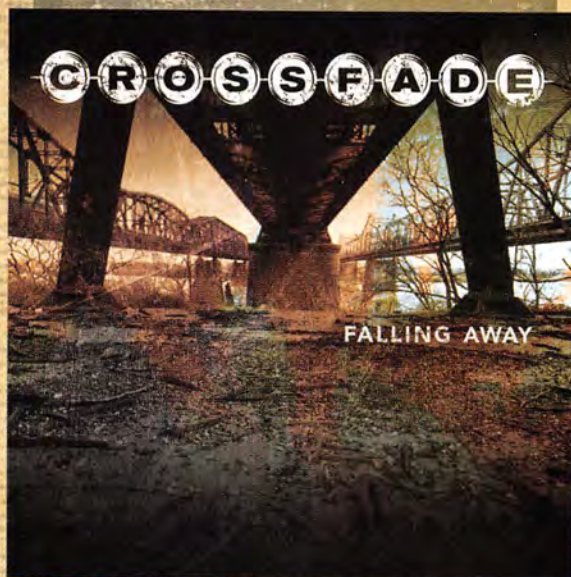
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New Releases The Guide



John Mellencamp savors a light lunch of tar and nicotine.

having as much fun as possible before getting swallowed up into adulthood, John Mellencamp has been a Top 40 contradiction: a patriotic rebel, a proud worshipper of the American Dream and a chronicler of disillusionment. At his best he has juggled these extremes sympathetically; but on his 21st album, despite a rich, brooding folk rock that returns him to the sound of his late-'80s creative high point, there are two vastly different Mellencamps. One is a flag-waver, singing simplistic anthems like "Our Country." The other, overshadowed Mellencamp is quieter and wiser, worrying about cruelties committed in the name of God and country—and, in the chilling "Rural Route," about a girl handed a grim fate by her meth-addict father. It would take more than jingoistic bromides like "We can turn our dreams into a way of life" to cheer her up.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD: "Rural Route"

MOE.

THE CONCH ★★½

FATBOY

Granola-circuit stars read *Lord of the Flies*, get serious

Clocking in at 75 minutes, moe.'s sprawling eighth studio album is about half the length of their dependably epic live shows and about two-thirds terrific. Improv rockers can't win in the studio, of course; too much playing turns off pop purists, while too little fucks with the fan base. *The Conch* tries to split the difference while saving the real jams for the stage. Fiery-fingered guitarists Chuck Garvey and Al Schnier stick to rippingly played if lyrically fuzzy tunes about home, hearth and the open road. It's left to bassist Rob Derhak, who

often comes off as the group's grumpy grownup, to raise the existential bar with a handful of melodic yet mournful songs about suicide, betrayal and a species of hellfire that's "cold as ice." Come for the grooves, stay for the gravitas.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD: "Lost Along the Way," "Wind It Up"

YOKO ONO

YES, I'M A WITCH ★★★½

ASTRALWERKS

Startlingly good remixes of the batty artist formerly known as "Oh, no!"

The world's most famous cult musician has won the admiration of jazzbos, new wavers, no wavers, riot grrls and dance DJs in her 45-year career, and it's not just because she can ululate like an orgasmic mental patient. Caught between crystalline emotion and conceptual play, her decades of uneven pop and sometimes-bewildering experiments hold something for every stripe of charismatic weirdo. Here Cat Power, Peaches, DJ Spooky and others reimagine songs spanning Ono's catalogue, typically layering her original, haunting-to-haranguing vocals over their own music. For Ono—who has "made" visual art simply by asking that people picture something in their heads—this surrendering of her craft makes perfect sense. And it works: Her voice, threaded into the idiosyncratic sounds her acolytes carefully cultivate, morphs into excellent electro hooks and harrowing confessions. If the students sound like masters, then Yoko's generous legacy is secure.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD: Cat Power, "Revelations"; Peaches, "Kiss Kiss Kiss"; Blow-Up, "Everyman ... Everywoman"



Good news, ladies—25 Shins, no waiting!

LONELY HEARTS CLUB

ADORABLE, DOWNCAST SHELPS ADD SOME POLISH

THE SHINS

WINNING THE NIGHT AWAY ★★☆☆

SUB POP

DEPRESSION AND HEARTACHE have been very good to James Mercer. With the Shins' ramshackle 2001 debut, *Oh, Inverted World*, he became a spokesman for the "shut-out, pimpled and angry," fuming about sick relationships and scarred friendships like he'd plugged in his guitar 10 minutes after dodging a flying boom box. "New Slang," an acoustic moan about a girlfriend-who-wasn't, ended up on the hit *Garden State* soundtrack—and on the lips of Natalie Portman, whose character cooed that the song "will change your life, I swear!"

Now Mercer faces a dilemma: What happens when a sad-eyed "Young Pilgrim" becomes successful and well-adjusted? Semi-famous, semi-rich (the Shins' first two albums sold about a million copies combined) and even married, he's given himself a slight makeover. On the chiming rallying cry "Sleeping Lessons," the best song on the Portland, Oregon, band's third album, he's warbling as a recently minted leader: "Just put yourself in my new hooves/And see that I do what I do." And he's glossing up the Shins, too, tossing the about-to-fall-apart tone of 2003's *Chutes Too Narrow*.

Winning is formalist indie pop, more concerned with being Modest Mouse-perfect than SoundScan-ambitious. It's catchy, literary, lushly produced, and

every banjo pluck is in the right place, as if Mercer diagrammed the sweetly off-kilter arrangements on a blackboard during morning band briefings. Aiming for a more luxe and orchestral sound, the Shins experiment with shoegazer guitars, organs, swelling strings, distorted vocals and dramatic, Smiths-style choruses they've clearly been dying to unleash.

But all that carefulness turns out to be bloodless. It's hard to say good-bye to the band's addictively intimate losers-in-a-basement sound, and Mercer's lyrics are far more at-arm's-length now, too. He seems to portray a tortured teenage lesbian couple in "Phantom Limb," and on the spare, burbling "Red Rabbits," he sings, cryptically, about bunnies melting in a crucible. On

the standouts, he's back to his old breakup woes, but with richer detail and nuance. It was time for the Shins to tinker with their formula; now they're one step away from the masterpiece Portman promised us.

SIA MICHEL

DOWNLOAD: "Sleeping Lessons," "Australia," "Sea Legs"

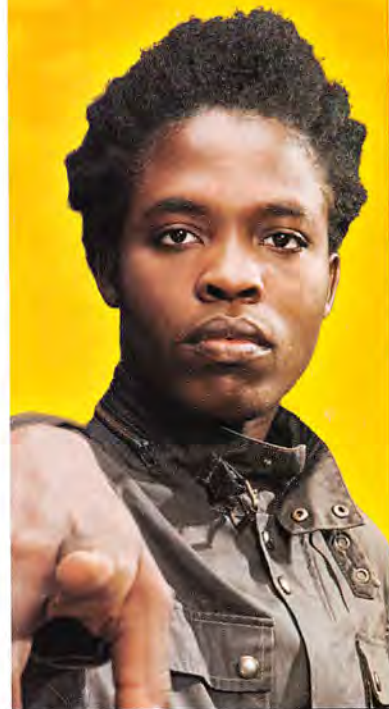
JAMES MERCER'S CURRENT LISTENING

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New Releases The Guide



UGK say F.U.
to PETA.

SOUTHERN COMFORT

A RETURN OF THE KINGZ ALMOST AS LONG AS PETER JACKSON'S

UGK

UGK UNDERGROUND KINGZ ***

JIVE

UGK MAY BE the most important hip-hop group you've never heard of. Natives of Port Arthur, an oil-refining town near Houston, Bun B and Pimp C spent the '90s drawing up the blueprint for Southern rap. As Brian Eno said of the Velvet Underground, not too many cats bought their albums—but everyone who did seems to have become an MC. After the duo's brief flirtation with the mainstream in 1999 (a stellar guest spot on Jay-Z's "Big Pimpin'"), Pimp C was arrested for aggravated assault and later sentenced to eight years in prison; when Houston hip-hop exploded, its most gifted veterans were stuck on the sidelines.

Now Pimp is free on parole, and UGK's seventh album is like a return from exile, with admirers from T.I. to Dizzee Rascal stopping by to kiss the ring. But as homecoming celebrations go, it's modest: more back-porch barbecue than ticker-tape parade. Pimp, who handles most of the production duties, favors bluesy live instrumentation and gently rippling funk samples that give his songs a pleasantly woozy, codeine-high vibe. On more manic tracks like "Hit the Block," a Swizz Beatz-produced paroxysm of wailing sirens and machine-gun fire, the pair just seems lost—a couple of country boys teleported into the middle of a war zone.

Of the two, Bun B is the better rapper, and you can hear his influence from T.I.'s lissome syllable-stretching to Young Jeezy's booming coke fantasies. Here he plays drug kingpin, history professor and ghetto sermonizer without ever sounding pedantic or treacly. Occasionally they'll drop a sex rap or two, but like most Houston MCs, UGK save the real objectification for their cars. On "Chrome Plated Woman," Bun lusts after pretty grilles and roomy trunks—which for once aren't metaphors—while the paint-job-praising "Candy" glides along like a wide, lazy left turn.

Maybe too lazy. Comprising two discs and 26 tracks, *Kingz* clocks in at a ridiculous 119 minutes. Pimp C spent less time than that behind bars. On the spoken-word outro, Bun thanks the resilient listeners who've managed to make it all the way to the end: "It's a whole lot of songs," he drawls sheepishly. Perhaps next time they'll consider time off for good behavior.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD: "The Game Belongs to Me,"
"Cocaine" feat. Rick Ross

BUN B'S CURRENT LISTENING

TRICK DADDY
BACK BY THUG DEMAND SLIP-N-SLIDE/ATLANTIC

YOUNG JEEZY
THE INSPIRATION DEF JAM

PAGODA

PAGODA ★★☆☆

ECSTATIC PEACE/UNIVERSAL

Actor puts Sundance on hold, gets in touch with his inner guitar animal

In the film *Last Days*, Michael Pitt played a suicide-bound rocker clearly modeled on Kurt Cobain. With *Pagoda*, the 25-year-old actor is again flying the flannel. His look—dirty jeans, destroyed pocket tees, blond shag—is as note-perfect as his voice, which sneers and wails in a manner most Kurt; and his guitar, mean and off-kilter, follows suit. Pitt radiates his own haunting charisma, though, veering between ambivalent pinings (“I don’t want to see you, I just need you near”), icky nursery rhymes (“Little fetus/Waiting to meet us”) and masochistic pleas (“Kiss me like a knife”). But unlike Cobain, he’s more interested in creepy ambience and structural experiments than quiet-loud explosions. In interviews, Pitt stresses that he’s not just another actor slumming in a band. He needn’t bother: Even if this is an act, it’s a perfectly good one.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD: “Lesson Learned,” “Voices”

PETER BJORN AND JOHN

WRITER’S BLOCK ★★☆☆½

ALMOST GOLD

Sweden: It’s for lovers—really bummed-out ones

Breaking up is hard to do. Zoning out, not so much. When these Swedes get whacked by romance, they cushion the blow with a reed-kneed bedroom boogie that shimmies while evoking decades of great escapist groove music—from Swingin’-60s pop to disco to the tranced-out New Zealand



I LOVE THIS CD!

FRED ARMISEN
JOANNA NEWSOM
YS
DRAG CITY

“I can’t imagine how anyone can think of putting words together like she does. Her harp playing is really percussive and complex. She’s hypnotizing.”



Ashley Tisdale considers a starring role in *Pomona Junior College Musical*.

indie rock the trio worshipfully bites on “Chills.” PB&J sing like guys fighting a love hangover that has morphed into a wicked cold, giving even the happy moments on their proper U.S. debut (like the sprightly twerp-funk tune “Young Folks”) a tinge of melancholy. Sadly, a bonus disc of fun-extracting flotsam and so-so remixes to entice shoppers who bought the import last year adds only a tinge of rip-off. Commerce, like love, can burn the deeply devoted.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: “Young Folks,” “Let’s Call It Off”

DIANA ROSS

I LOVE YOU ★★☆☆

MANHATTAN/EMI

Album of “romantic songs” from the original *Dreamgirl*, now 62, is romantic like a scented candle from Walgreens

When Diana Ross sings, she peddles “sincerity,” that synthetic derivative of heart cultivated by pageant queens who prize glamour above all else. Ross’s commercially tested brand is a mixture of saccharine and vinegar that has thinned over the decades as its secret ingredient, Motown sass, has leaked into the ozone. As she drizzles what’s left of this syrupy substance over a collection of mostly familiar ballads, you’re acutely aware of how much more passion and intelligence were conveyed in the original versions. Her icky-nostalgic rendition of Harry Nilsson’s “Remember” ignores the song’s dark side. She makes Marvin Gaye’s “I Want You” as lustful as an air kiss at a fashion shoot

ASTONISHING FACT!
Ashley Tisdale’s grandpa, pitchman Arnold Morris, hawked the first Ginsu knife. But wait! There’s more! She’s also kin to infomercial king Ron Popeil.

and reduces Jackie Wilson’s “To Be Loved,” a raw pop-gospel cry, to a dinky little jingle. Think of *I Love You* as background music for beauty sleep and its object of adoration the singer’s image in the mirror.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

DOWNLOAD: “Always and Forever”

ASHLEY TISDALE

HEADSTRONG ★★☆☆½

WARNER BROS.

High School Musical star tries a more challenging medium: pop songs

Ashley Tisdale has a gift. Not an angelic voice or a dazzling personality, but an even rarer commodity: millions of “pre-sold” tweens eager to buy her debut album. Yet the 21-year-old singer, whose drama-bringing mean-girl helped make *High School Musical* thespian-chic, doesn’t import much of her character’s pushy spunk in this transition from Disney to dance-pop. Miracle

workers like the Matrix and Diane Warren fashion a reliable mix of electro-bubbly jams and I-am-me balladry (the *Little Mermaid*-worthy “Suddenly”), but no stylistic slipper fits quite right. Striving to be “the kind of chick that hits spots in my flip-flops listening to hip-hop,” she sounds more like a yearbook editor who will one day terrify her children by singing along with *Annie* way too loudly at traffic lights. And who needs that drama?

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: “Positivity,” “Suddenly”



fall out boy



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Lucinda Williams prepares to crucify some jonquils.

TOUGH LOVE

MORE HIGHWAYS AND HEARTACHES FROM THE FIRST LADY OF MOANS

LUCINDA WILLIAMS

WEST ★★

LOST HIGHWAY

THROUGHOUT A 28-YEAR career, Lucinda Williams has been tagged an alt-country queen and a folkie. But in many ways, she's really a blues singer, working variations on the same desolation-row themes. At 54, she's nowhere close to settling down or finding peace. She's still inviting men into her "world of loneliness/And wickedness/And bitterness," and she's still rattled when they don't stick around. In "Words," she realizes her writing pen is her only bud.

Producer Hal Willner helps Williams come up with a more musically stable record than 2003's woozy, boozy *World Without Tears*; he frames her beautiful, lived-in rasp with hearth-cozy arrangements. But the album is often duller than its predecessors, with bummed-out banalities repeated from previous records; at times, she seems to be dragging herself through her own songs.

The recent death of her mother inspires Williams to write, with literary detail, about the onset of tears ("Mama You Sweet") and to craft a mountain ballad ("Fancy Funeral"). Even better, her voice is set a few times to a kind of ambient country, atmospheric grooves that chug like rubber-wheeled railroad cars. In "Rescue," she admits there's little a man could do to save a woman from "the waning winters of your youth." Williams trails off into a reconciled string of *la la las* and, for a few more minutes, lifts up herself and her art yet again.

DAVID BROWNE

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Rescue," "Are You Alright?"

WILLIAMS: ALAN MESSER

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VIETNAM

VIETNAM ★½

KEMADO

Eighth-generation hippies stick it to the Man, simply

Brooklyn's VietNam aren't named after a country, but an era—the days when men with long hair and mustaches could jam on slow three-chord tunes about being free to ride their machines without being hassled by the Man. In theory, their first full-length album should be a faded-Technicolor spectacle of hippie rage. In practice, it means alternately anemic and bombastic Velvet Underground and Spiritualized rip-offs with the wankiest lead guitar this side of 1973. Every time the quartet starts to work up a little incense-scented steam, frontman Michael Gerner groans some god-awful lyric like, "Oh, babe/What else can I say?/She was a pretty good lay/At least that's what they said"—and when the choir joins in, that doesn't help.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD: None

YOUNG LOVE

YOUNG LOVE ★★½

ISLAND

N'Yer throws a big, dull dance party

Like Brian Wilson's California beaches, the dance floor provides Young Love mastermind Dan Keyes a familiar milieu to transform adolescent yearning into sonic drama. On this debut, his jagged electro-rock reaches stadium-size grandiosity, voicing a club kid's pursuit of the perfect grind partner. Unfortunately, his derivative songs fail to shake booties; it's just not sexy to scream, "You must dance dance dance!" The cooldown tracks cut deeper, particularly "Tell Me," where Keyes nurses a wicked Justin Timberlake falsetto while watching one more cutie leave him behind. He sounds more confident losing the girl than landing her.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD: "Tell Me"

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CIARA: THE EVOLUTION

LA FACE

More woozy love jams and dance-floor candy from Aaliyah's heir apparent.


YOUNG JEEZY
THE INSPIRATION

DEF JAM

Drug rap's charismatic evil king returns, as on-message as ever: crack, crack, crack.


MICKEY AVALON
MICKEY AVALON

MYSPEACE/INTERSCOPE

A self-made dirtbag raps about taking life slow and sleazy. Surprisingly good.


VARIOUS ARTISTS
HYPHY HITZ

TVT

The most fun hip-hop genre on earth powers this rambunctious collection. Yadadamean?

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5

DAUGHTRY

"IT'S NOT OVER"

DAUGHTRY

Take that, haters! After getting the unceremonious boot off of *American Idol*, Chris Daughtry has shorn his handle down to a leaner, harder-rocking, surname-only form and returned with a chart-topping album, powered by this anguished devotion. You can catch him on a national club tour through April 15th.

HOW WE DID IT

aolmusic.com

The Most Wanted Songs chart is based on the number of audience searches, downloads and video plays on AOLmusic.com.

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"THIS AIN'T A SCENE, IT'S AN ARMS RACE"	FALL OUT BOY	INFINITY ON HIGH ISLAND
2	"I WANNA LOVE YOU"	AKON FEAT. SNOOP DOGG	KONVICTED UNIVERSAL
3	"WHAT GOES AROUND ..."	JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE	FUTURESEX/LOVESOUNDS JIVE
4	"KEEP HOLDING ON"	AVRIL LAVIGNE	ERAGON SOUNDTRACK RCA
5	"IT'S NOT OVER"	DAUGHTRY	DAUGHTRY 19 RECORDINGS/RCA
6	"IF EVERYONE CARED"	NICKELBACK	ALL THE RIGHT REASONS ROADRUNNER
7	"RIDE FOR YOU"	DANITY KANE	DANITY KANE BAD BOY
8	"READ MY MIND"	THE KILLERS	SAM'S TOWN ISLAND
9	"WALK AWAY (REMEMBER ME)"	PAULA DEANDA	PAULA DEANDA ARISTA
10	"GLAMOROUS"	FERGIE	THE DUTCHESS INTERSCOPE
11	"YOU"	LLOYD FEAT. LIL WAYNE	STREET LOVE THE INC./UNIVERSAL MOTOWN
12	"LAST NIGHT"	DIDDY FEAT. KEYSHIA COLE	PRESS PLAY BAD BOY
13	"THE SWEET ESCAPE"	GWEN STEFANI FEAT. AKON	THE SWEET ESCAPE INTERSCOPE
14	"HERE (IN YOUR ARMS)"	HELLOGOODBYE	ZOMBIES! ALIENS! VAMPIRES! DINOSAURS! DRIVE THRU
15	"RESOLUTION"	NICK LACHEY	WHAT'S LEFT OF ME JIVE
16	"SHORTIE LIKE MINE"	BOW WOW	THE PRICE OF FAME COLUMBIA
17	"HOW TO TOUCH A GIRL"	JOJO	THE HIGH ROAD DA FAMILY/BLACKGROUND
18	"OVER IT"	KATHARINE MCPHEE	KATHARINE MCPHEE RCA
19	"SUDDENLY I SEE"	KT TUNSTALL	EYE TO THE TELESCOPE VIRGIN
20	"TAKE CONTROL"	AMERIE	BECAUSE I LOVE IT COLUMBIA
21	"BOSTON"	AUGUSTANA	ALL THE STARS AND BOULEVARDS EPIC
22	"THE RIVER"	GOOD CHARLOTTE	GOOD MORNING REVIVAL EPIC
23	"HONESTLY"	CARTEL	CHROMA EPIC
24	"TELL ME 'BOUT IT"	JOSS STONE	INTRODUCING JOSS STONE VIRGIN
25	"FAMOUS LAST WORDS"	MY CHEMICAL ROMANCE	THE BLACK PARADE REPRISE
26	"LITHIUM"	EVANESCENCE	THE OPEN DOOR WIND-UP
27	"GO!"	MARIO	GO! J
28	"GO TOO FAR"	JIBBS FEAT. MELODY THORNTON	JIBBS FEATURING JIBBS GEFEN
29	"BREAK IT OFF"	RIHANNA FEAT. SEAN PAUL	A GIRL LIKE ME DEF JAM
30	"DASHBOARD"	MODEST MOUSE	WE WERE DEAD BEFORE THE SHIP EVEN SANK EPIC
31	"DANGEROUS"	YING YANG TWINS FEAT. WYCLEF JEAN	CHEMICALLY IMBALANCED TVT
32	"WE RIDE (I SEE THE FUTURE)"	MARY J. BLIGE	REFLECTIONS—A RETROSPECTIVE GEFEN
33	"A DREAM"	COMMON FEAT. WILL.I.AM	FREEDOM WRITERS SOUNDTRACK HOLLYWOOD

WEEK ENDING // JANUARY 28, 2007

9

PAULA DEANDA

"WALK AWAY (REMEMBER ME)"

PAULA DEANDA

This tender jam from 17-year-old cutie DeAnda, cowritten by Ne-Yo, is about seeing your ex with his new girl and wondering if she's as good to him as you were. It's just like that Hinder song, only without the grunting. Catch her next month on a brief national tour.



LLOYD

"YOU" FEAT. LIL WAYNE

STREET LOVE

Irv Gotti's 21-year-old protégé can snag a girl in the club and jet off in his Benz without breaking a sweat, as he proves in this silky single. Add a verse from Lil Wayne and smoothness levels = through the roof! Next month, grab your shades and peep Lloyd in Florida at BET's Spring Bling.



20

AMERIE

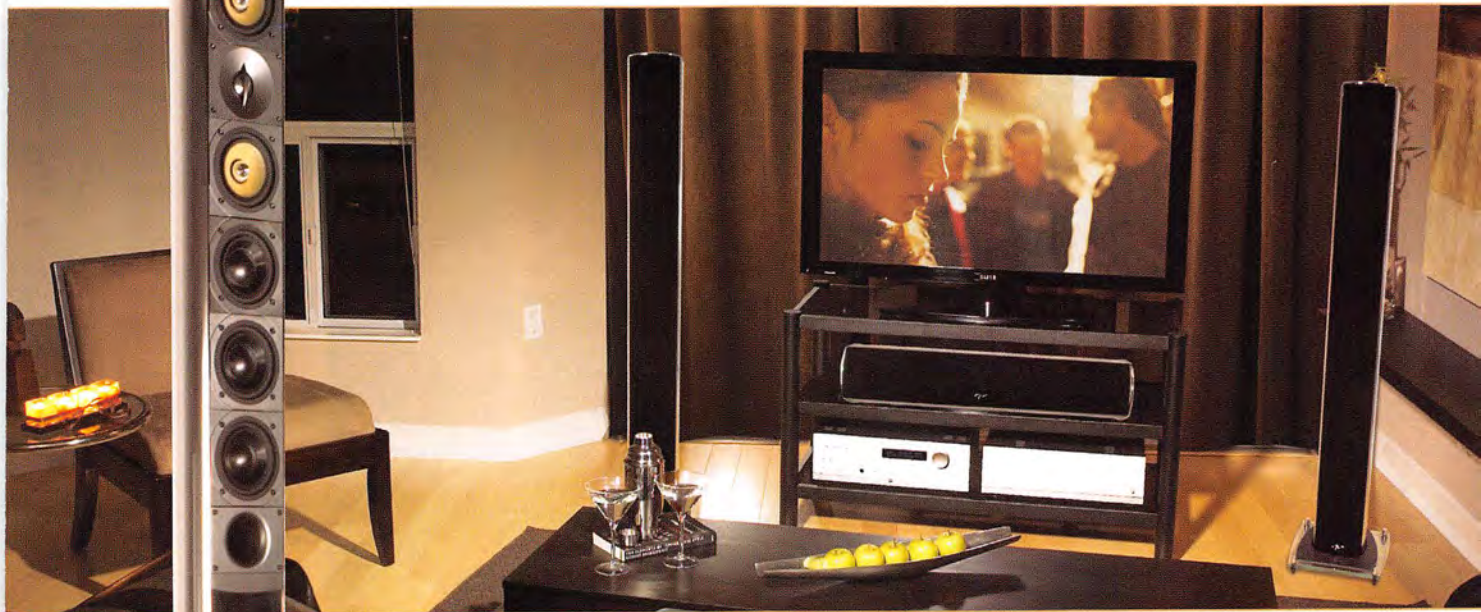
"TAKE CONTROL"

BECAUSE I LOVE IT

The spy-movie guitars on this single must have gone to Amerie's head—why else would a self-described good girl stomp through the video pretending to be an assassin? In addition to harboring murderous fantasies, Amerie has also launched a series of mix tapes. Ask for volume two at your local bootlegger's.

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MARY J. BLIGE

REFLECTIONS—A RETROSPECTIVE ★★★★★

GEFFEN

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT Mary. And Mary knowing Mary. And Mary loving Mary and respecting Mary just for being Mary. And if there's a singer in the world who can make words like this mean something, you know what her name is. Somehow her husky, cellulite-and-all voice paints a whole mural of aching urban life in a mere phrase or two, a power that's been variously described as mystical, spiritual and gynecological. ("Mary sings from the pussy," mused one critic a decade ago.) Even in her current, third-person, inner-journey, self-actualized period, Mary J. Blige commands unparalleled respect. Rising at a time when black women faced new challenges at home and work, she came to embody that struggle like nobody else, ultimately becoming what she remains today: alpha female of the hip-hop generation.

Blige has moved, inspired or punched at least half that generation since she appeared in 1992. As her coeval Mariah Carey was cooing from atop pretty ponies and rope swings, Blige was threatening interviewers with beatdowns and giv-

ing photographers a sullen stare, like a gangsta rapper. Through the '90s, the sound of her voice and the drama in her backstory meshed into some palpably modern sense of "soul," one scores of singers tried to emulate but none had the angst to pull off. "I remember," she sings in the title single of her first compilation, "back when pain was all I had to give." Like our few true divas—Diana Ross, Karen Carpenter, Elton John—Blige isn't just a singer but a reality-show tragedienne. She's a Lifetime special with beats by Jimmy Jam and Dr. Dre, expressing an inner pain as plain as the scar under her lovely almond-shaped eye.

Born in the Bronx, she grew up periodically abused in Yonkers's notoriously violent Schlobaum Projects, the daughter of a nurse and a jazz musician (he split when Mary was 4). At 21, she released her debut, *What's the 411?*, stage-managed by Uptown junior exec Puffy Combs, whose greatest achievement may remain marketing her and other New York ghetto kids as pop stars. That record also launched the career of Biggie Smalls, and her buoyant, transcendent single "Real Love" helped



SHE THREATENED INTERVIEWERS WITH BEATDOWNS, LIKE A GANGSTA RAPPER.

win her coronation as queen of hip-hop soul. Then she started writing her own songs.

The combination of crazy-love confessional, recovery-group sharing and soul historicism reached its apogee in the mid-'90s, represented here by "Be Happy" and the *Waiting to Exhale* soundtrack weeper "Not Gon' Cry." But by decade's end, Blige was moving from a boozy girl-thug with man trouble (dogged by both Jodeci's Cedric Hailey and Nas) to a refined R&B classicist singing songs by Elton John and Stevie Wonder—forging an anti-Whitney Houston arc, from hood rat to sophisticated lady. Saved and sobered up by record-exec hubby Martin Kendu Issacs (who produced the Grammy-honored "Be Without You"), she now sings redemption lyrics like "That was Mary then, and this is Mary now," almost apologetic for being so happy.

Sure, she can pull off domestic bliss, but new quiet-storm duets with Wyclef and John Legend are less vital than earlier cuts like "I'll Be There for You/You're All I Need to Get By," a spooky, gritty love song and the monster summer-jam of '95. Blige spars with the obliquely chopped hook and Method Man's snarling testimonial, keeping the song's smoggy chaos in check with a single vocal line. There's character in that imperfect voice, and a message, too. It tells you it will waver, it will miss notes, it will show its cuts and bruises; but it won't hide. And no matter how badly it's been hurt, it Will. Not. Give Up.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD: "Real Love," "Be Happy," "No More Drama," "I'll Be There for You/You're All I Need to Get By"



Mary J. Blige, stuck on step 2 of the Macarena.



Joan Jett tries to communicate with John Edward.

JETT PACK

A SCRAWNY TOUGH WHO MASTERED TWO TOPICS: ROCK AND ROLL

JOAN JETT

BAD REPUTATION ★★★★★

I LOVE ROCK N' ROLL ★★★★★

FIT TO BE TIED ★★★★★

BLACKHEART

THE JETT-PROPELLED salvos "Do You Wanna Touch Me (Oh Yeah)" and "I Love Rock n' Roll" are seared into music history like Blackheart tats. But MTV's first great rocker chick may offer her raison d'être in a throwaway line from "Doing All Right With the Boys," a butt-kicking track from 1981's *Bad Reputation*: "Hey, you," she shouts, backing us against the wall and holding a switchblade to our throat, "what's your point of view?" Jett had one, freeing herself from the Run-aways, her manipulated all-girl punk band, to prove that the hoariest rock & roll BS (and the cheesiest oldies, from "Wooly Bully" to "Shout") could come alive in the hands of a riff-blitzing new-wave honey with confrontational bangs.

After a bland 1980 debut (not included in a new raft of career-spanning reissues), the Philly-born, Cali-scarred singer-guitarist found her voice on *Bad Reputation*. The Ramones-backed title cut sets the tone, with hand-clap-heavy drums and glossy two-chord noise grounding Jett's reworkings of '60s archetypes—the sexually pushy brat of "Do You Wanna Touch Me," the wronged girl-group singer demanding respect on "You Don't Own Me," the liberated heshier queen of "Too Bad on Your Birthday." Jett grew brassier and looser later that year on *I Love Rock n' Roll*, with a new crew, the Blackhearts, adding metalhead swagger as she sneered at hurt ("Love Is Pain"), persecution ("Victim of Circumstance") and good taste (her hellaciously goofy cover of "Crimson and Clover"). Endearingly strange versions of Sly Stone's "Everyday People" (from 1983's *Album*) and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* theme can't salvage *Fit to Be Tied*, a best-of that isn't really; Jett accepted original-riot-grrrl status in the '90s, working with inheritors like Bikini Kill and the Gits, who forwarded her tough, essentialist point of view after she'd run out of ways to deepen it.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: "Bad Reputation," "Doing All Right With the Boys," "Victim of Circumstance," "I Hate Myself for Loving You"

Reissues The Guide

THE SCORE

★★★★★	CLASSIC
★★★★	GREAT
★★★	GOOD
★★	MEDIOCRE
★	FOUL

CERRONE

CERRONE BY BOB SINCLAR

★★★★

LOVE IN C MINOR ★★★★★

RECALL

Pioneering disco from a dirty-talking Frenchman

The mustachioed French composer-producer Jean-Marc Cerrone was second only to the mustachioed Italian composer-producer Giorgio Moroder in the spangled annals of European disco. He's a forgotten figure these days, but his signature formula—thumping bass lines plus swooping strings—still defines club music on the Continent. Combining '70s originals and lightly airbrushed remixes, the compilation *Cerrone by Bob Sinclar* is a filler-free introduction to the granddaddy of Air and Daft Punk. Kitche enthusiasts are directed to Cerrone's proper albums (five are being reissued), not least for the cover art's hallucinogenic erotica. His 1976 debut, *Love in C Minor*, is worth it just for the uncensored version of the title track, which opens with a minute and a half of lewd banter ("That ain't no banana") and goes on for 15 more minutes, stretching into a soft-core minisymphony of tension and release. It's proof positive of an old disco axiom: length matters.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD: "Love in C Minor," "Supernature," "Revelacion"

JOSEF K

ENTOMOLOGY ★★★★★

DOMINO

Bookish Scots sang about misery, didn't outstay their welcome

Considering they were named for a Franz Kafka character, scorned such frivolities as getting drunk and aimed to reflect the murderous anxiety of the modern world, Josef K were fun despite themselves. The Edinburgh quartet gave the impression that there was no time to waste, setting Paul Haig's bleakly witty crooning (a song about the suicide of Joy

Division singer Ian Curtis was called "It's Kinda Funny") to busy, urgent, discofied punk: tenser than either their label-mates Orange Juice or their fans Franz Ferdinand, but gripping and vibrant. Drawn from their sole official album and an unreleased predecessor, plus singles and radio sessions, this collection has no chinks in its armor, testament to Josef K's iron self-discipline. They broke up in 1981, after just three years, as if to continue would have been unforgivably decadent.

DORIAN LYNSEY

DOWNLOAD: "Sorry for Laughing," "It's Kinda Funny," "Chance Meeting"

MERCURY REV

THE ESSENTIAL MERCURY REV: STILLNESS BREATHES 1991-2006 ★★★★★

V2

A band that loved tripping, trips up in telling its own story

Some psychedelic sailors travel in a paper boat. Even as shoe-gazing squall-riders out of Buffalo, New York, in the early '90s, Mercury Rev were fragile folk, as happy puffing a flute as stomping a distortion pedal. When Mercury Rev cut down on the noise (and jettisoned loony-bird singer David Baker), the massive symphonies they sculpted on 1998's *Deserter's Songs* boosted both the tenderness and the grandeur (no easy trick), while ex-Flaming Lips guitarist Jonathan Donahue's pillowy voice softened drug-puffed fantasias they further explored on two '00s albums. This chronologically jumbled retrospective under-sells their musical progression and adds a disc of superfan-only accessories, like a jam behind poet Robert Creeley and some what-were-they-smoking covers ("Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds," guys?). Hippies love the future; maybe someday we'll get a truer rendering of these hippies' past.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD: "Something for Joey," "Goddess on a Highway"

GEORGE MICHAEL

TWENTY FIVE ★★★★★

EPIC

From Wham! to eternity, this career-spanning triple set is no walk in the park

Once the Adonis of sunny '80s pop, George Michael has had a hard time since his 1998 arrest for "engaging in a lewd act" in an L.A. men's toilet and his subsequent coming out. Compared with a new



Paul Weller and the Jam: "Where the hell is Mr. Blonde?"



Sublime: "Nice gardenias." "Let's smoke 'em!"

generation of pink 'n' proud singers, he's the Uncle Creepy of gay pop, and a Bush-baiting video for "Shoot the Dog" effectively snuffed his U.S. career. This 44-track retrospective feels like overcompensation. The three CDs are divided thematically: "For Living" is pop-dance and enjoyable; "For Loving" is sludgy—Michael's a lot more uptight about romance than sex; and "For Loyal" (uh?) features new songs and is fans-only. What stands out are the coded pleas for understanding in his early songs and his burdensome need to behave like a serious artist when he's much better at making joyful modern disco.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD: "Everything She Wants," "Faith"

ROXETTE

A COLLECTION OF ROXETTE HITS! THEIR 20 GREATEST SONGS
★★★★

EMI

Another look at Sweden's No. 2 mixed-gender pop act

If ABBA remain the Beatles of European bubblegum, then Roxette, their Swedish compatriots, are the genre's Zombies—hook-crazed followers whose fleeting U.S. chart success merely hints at their knack for embedding conflicting emotions and complex harmonies within ostensibly simple pop. Remembered for 1989's Prince-ly knickknack "The Look" and 1990's sweet teardrop "It Must Have Been Love," Roxette still score hits worldwide as their influence lingers. (Kelly Clarkson's Swede-crafted "Since U Been Gone" resembles a Roxette ballad sung over a Roxette rocker.) Per Gessle's settings on this 18-year retrospective swing from the Ennio Morricone melodrama of "Crash! Boom! Bang!" to the kiddie-techno

sing-along of "Stars," while Marie Fredriksson's secret melancholy substantiates the duo's sheen with a particularly Scandinavian sorrow.

BARRY WALTERS

DOWNLOAD: "Sleeping in My Car," "Crash! Boom! Bang!"

SNEAKERS

NONSEQUITUR OF SILENCE
★★★★½

COLLECTORS' CHOICE

Blurry snapshots of a North Carolina band that helped launch '80s indie rock

Sneakers' 1976 and 1979 EPs rumbled through the American underground like a dented Pinto with its engine catching fire: The tin-can production, whiny vocals, akimbo melodies and overreaching metaphors ("Love's Like a Cuban Crisis"), all delivered with science-club exuberance, claimed important new ground for rock freaks and geeks. Headed by Chris Stamey and Mitch Easter, who later led the dB's and Let's Active, respectively, and galvanized miniscenes from Hoboken, New Jersey, to Athens, Georgia, Sneakers' do-it-yourself ethic couldn't hide their pop ambi-

tions; the boppy "What I Dig" is just a decent amplifier shy of a masterpiece, while "No Wonder," a romantic bust-up with synth fills and backward guitar, gets pretty much all the way there.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD: "No Wonder," "What I Dig"

SUBLIME

EVERYTHING UNDER THE SUN
★★★★½

GEFFEN

An odds-and-ends collection offers these Long Beach bums a belated reggae-punk coronation

On the eve of Sublime's 1996 self-titled major-label debut, singer Bradley Nowell's life ended in a heroin overdose. In the absence of a sustained career, this three-CD, one-DVD rarities box offers an impressive stand-in. Unencumbered by commercial considerations, this material does a better job than *Sublime* of revealing the band's strength: Fluent in hard-core, hip-hop and ska, they were a reggae-fusion band in the tradition of the Clash and Bad Brains, digging deep into '80s dancehall for

inspiration. A 1990 demo of "Roots of Creation," from their first recording session, lays the blueprint, joyfully bouncing between punk and skank. Buoyed by Nowell's big-hearted combination of horniness and humanism, Sublime refined the formula over the next six years. Though bloated with live tracks, *Everything* tells the story of the backyard-barbecue band that could but never fully did.

GREG MILLNER

DOWNLOAD: "Roots of Creation," "89 Vision," "Caress Me Dub"

PAUL WELLER

HIT PARADE ★★★★★

YEP! ROC

Four-CD retrospective of the singer-songwriter who inspired Green Day's fake British accents

From 1977's fiercely romantic, guitar-slashing Jam debut "In the City" to 2005's gnarled, propulsive solo track "From the Floorboards Up," 30 years of singles by Paul Weller's various incarnations reveal a sensitive heart habitually cloaked in vehemence. In his middle period, his zealous following puzzled over the Style Council's exotic cocktail of left-wing politics, jazz and soul (high spot: the heady summer pop of "You're the Best Thing"), but a '90s return to '60s pop values brought him dean-of-Britpop status and a rare streak of serenity. In fact, for all the pugnacity and polemic on display over these 67 tracks, it's a simple, rustic ballad—"You Do Something to Me"—that cuts deepest. For once, it's Paul Weller at peace.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD: "Going Underground," "You're the Best Thing," "You Do Something to Me"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best reissues from the past months



U2

U2 18 SINGLES

INTERSCOPE

From mullets to raver shades, this collection traces the stunning journey of the U.N.'s house band.



GANG STARR

MASS APPEAL: THE BEST OF

VIRGIN

This jazzbo rap duo's vivid street narratives and genre-defying loops still crackle, 15 years later.

READ THOUSANDS OF REVIEWS AND MORE AT BLENDER.COM.

TOM WAITS

CIGARETTE-CHEWING, RUM-GARGLING SINGER MAKES DEBAUCHERY SOUND LIKE A GAS **BY RJ SMITH**

EVERY
ORIGINAL
CD
REVIEWED

IF YOU'D SEEN Tom Waits skulking down Sunset Boulevard in the mid-'70s, you wouldn't have thought he was one of the greatest songwriters of his generation. Bedecked in eight-day stubble and a porkpie hat, looking like he'd spent the night sleeping under the piano in a titty bar, he made good citizens lock their car doors. Part of it was an act—but which part? It's difficult to know, because Waits loves to fabricate, but this much is clear: He was born in dusty Pomona, California, in 1949, the son of two schoolteachers who separated when he was 11. He dropped out of high school and took a job in a pizza parlor.

The transient scene of the third shift shaped him: His songs described an America lived at night and populated by winos and grifters, waitresses and traveling salesmen. And he performed with the panache of a standup comic—occasionally appearing on the late-'70s TV show *Fernwood 2-Night*, he memorably cracked, "I'd rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal lobotomy." His albums spoke to a secret society of bartenders, college dropouts and other smart but disgruntled loners. In the '80s, his songs got darker and weirder, and his voice even gnarlier—"I'm the sand in the sandwich," he likes to say. His songs have been covered by Bruce Springsteen, Rod Stewart, the Eagles and—soon—Scarlett Johansson. He's always been a role model for folks who go their own way.



TOM WAITS: A MAN WHO KNOWS THE IMPORTANCE OF A HEALTHY BREAKFAST.

ESSENTIAL

NIGHTHAWKS AT THE DINER

ASYLUM, 1975

★★★★★



Proudly shunning guitars for piano, bass and saxophone, this live recording is the ultimate early Waits, and it set a

tone: jazz songs that jazz fans mostly ignored. He was living in the grungy Hollywood Tropicana Motor Hotel with girlfriend Rickie Lee Jones, and he seems to have channeled his songs from what he heard through the walls: They're full of bad sex and good sax, surreal revelations and midnight rants. **Download:** "Better Off Without a Wife," "Nighthawk Postcards," "Big Joe and Phantom 309"

SWORDFISHTROMBONES

ISLAND, 1983

★★★★★



After the head of Asylum heard this, he dropped Waits—this wasn't the now-familiar cuddly outcast, this was

a man burning up his image and stitching together a new one. After hanging out with New York artists like Jim Jarmusch and Robert Frank, Waits began to write music that was as strange as his words. Madman rocker Captain Beefheart and outsider composer Harry Partch are touchstones for this clattering circus noise. **Download:** "16 Shells From a Thirty-Ought-Six," "Franks Wild Years," "Down, Down, Down"

REAL GONE

ANTI-, 2004

★★★★★



These days, Waits lives in California with his wife, Kathleen Brennan, and three children. Reuniting with the acidic guitar player Marc Ribot, who played on *Rain Dogs*, Waits reads the news and flips out. These blues-scorched grooves are full of images of war and death, as political as he ever gets. Bodies fall from the sky; he even sings a sentimental soldier's letter home that could have come from the Civil War or the Persian Gulf War. **Download:** "Hoist That Rag," "Sins of My Father," "Day After Tomorrow"

GREAT

SMALL CHANGE

ASYLUM, 1976

★★★★



This lifted him up from cult status; people started to see him as more than a freak-show attraction. The swinging studio veterans he assembled help. So does the way he roughs up his wastrel image—he wants you to know it's a hullabaloo drinking and shouting at satellites. **Download:** "The Piano Has Been Drinking," "Step Right Up"

RAIN DOGS

ISLAND, 1985

★★★★



By now, the guy who celebrated odd characters had a second career as a character actor, in *The Cotton Club* and

Down by Law. *Rain Dogs* is almost a movie itself, with a rewarding artiness that set Waits's status as a prestige artist. Rod Stewart later cut a hit version of "Downtown Train." **Download:** "Singapore," "Clap Hands," "Union Square"

FRANKS WILD YEARS

ISLAND, 1987

★★★★



He called this "un operachi romantico in two acts"; you can call it a song cycle tracking a down-and-out accordionist.

It starts with a drifter freezing to death on a park bench, then jumps back to chronicle his "happier moments," heard in gusts of rootsy weirdness. **Download:** "Innocent When You Dream," "Cold Cold Ground"

THE BLACK RIDER

ISLAND, 1993

★★★★



The recorded debut of a partnership with theater director Robert Wilson, Waits wrote this in Germany, and it sounds like open-mic night at Satan's Beerhaus. This cast recording reimagines a dark 19th-century folk tale and even features beat writer William Burroughs croaking out a little tune. **Download:** "Just the Right Bullets," "The Briar and the Rose"



CHECK IT OUT

THE HEART OF SATURDAY NIGHT

ASYLUM, 1974

★★★★



On his second LP, Waits reinvents himself: The laid-back cat fades out and a beatnik bellies up to the bar. Musically it's

more ambitious too; he develops his throaty moan, exploiting the rough spots in his voice and in his characters.

Download: "(Looking for) The Heart of Saturday Night," "San Diego Serenade"

HEARTATTACK AND VINE

ASYLUM, 1980

★★★★



He'd broken up with Rickie Lee Jones, was drinking too much and even tried to join a gym: That's how desperate Waits

was. There's more guitar and a new R&B pulse throughout, and a standout song, "Jersey Girl," which Bruce Springsteen regularly covered in concerts.

Download: "Jersey Girl," "Heart-attack and Vine"

MULE VARIATIONS

ANTI-, 1999

★★★★



He'd varnished his sentimentality, no longer trying to make his characters likable and instead just letting them be,

whether they be monsters or victims. Parlor ballads, gospel tunes and tons of blues: This cranky Americana is one of the best-selling CDs of his career.

Download: "Chocolate Jesus," "Filipino Box Spring Hog"

ORPHANS

ANTI-, 2006

★★★★



His wife and collaborator Kathleen Brennan, whom he met on a movie set in 1980, divides his music into "grand weepers and grim reapers," meaning sentimental heart-tuggers and death trips. This triple-decker of unreleased songs has a disc of each, and a third of experiments and alternate takes.

Download: "Road to Peace," "Little Man"

BE CAREFUL

CLOSING TIME

ASYLUM, 1973

★★



He never sounded more generic or Cali than on his debut—the Eagles even covered "Ol' 55" and had a hit. He'd get weirder

and better; here, he's at his most soft-hearted. He was only 24, but he wanted you to think he lived at the bar, smoking Roi-Tans and sucking down boiled eggs and Chivas Regal.

Download: "Ol' 55"

BEAUTIFUL MALADIES

ISLAND, 1998

★★★★



This compilation sums up the oblique post-Swordfishtrombones era, with 23 songs from his seven Island LPs.

It's a map of his second act as a patron saint of lo-fi. There's even a little bizarre between-song repartee that suggests what a great performance artist he'd be. Includes "Way Down in the Hole," which became the theme for HBO's *The Wire*.

Download: "Underground"

ALICE

ANTI-, 2002

★★



Teutonic show tunes from the rathskeller—if this record looked you in the eye, it would be wearing a monocle. It

began as another collaboration with Robert Wilson—this one an opera about the little girl who inspired the surreal tale *Alice in Wonderland*. Call it "Malice in Wonderland."

Download: "Kommienezuspadt"

BLOOD MONEY

ANTI-, 2002

★★



A companion to *Alice*, and another Wilson collaboration, this one for a revamped production of the play *Woyzeck*, which

ran in Europe for a short time. Morphine-drip slow songs about a mind melting away and medicine gone way wrong. And really, who would you rather have sing about madness? Nelly?

Download: "Misery Is the River of the World"

FOR FANS ONLY

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ASYLUM, 1977

★★



Strings only underscore Waits's latent sentimentality. And, boy, are there strings all over the place here, plus a

blowsy duet with Bette Midler. But he probably wasn't feeling so sentimental—Waits was arrested for an alleged brawl with the cops this same year.

Download: "Burma Shave"

BLUE VALENTINE

ASYLUM, 1978

★★



Waits must have felt the rumpled-hepat persona was getting too shticky. He opens with a cry-in-yer-rye cover of *West*

Side Story's "Somewhere," then gets off his stool and goes out into the world; rootlessness would become a big theme in his music. On the back cover, he poses with Rickie Lee Jones. "She was drinking a lot," he said. "And I was too, so we drank together."

Download: "Romeo Is Bleeding"

BIG TIME

ISLAND, 1988

★★



Mostly live, mostly already-recorded tunes—here are many highlights of his Island years, and the songs vary little from the

originals. Still, he'd earned a summing-up set—by 1988, he had such a signature sound, he sued Frito-Lay for using a raspy Tom Waits "sound-alike" in a Doritos commercial.

Download: "Strange Weather"

BONE MACHINE

ISLAND, 1992

★★



His first new LP in five years, this alternative-album Grammy winner launches late-era Waits, when he cuts back on the

big-screen artiness of *Franks Wild Years* and opts for thudding beats and one guitar plink instead of a solo. Junkyard rock: Rusty springs keep the beat and a discarded radiator becomes a sax.

Download: "I Don't Wanna Grow Up"

FURTHER LISTENING

ONE FROM THE HEART

CBS, 1982

★

Francis Ford Coppola and Waits are so tight, he even performed at daughter Sofia Coppola's wedding. But this music for Francis's movie is slack—a great jazz band can't stand up to the mismatched duets Waits sings with glossy country balladeer Crystal Gayle. Their voices work together almost as well as lipstick works on a pig.

Download: "Broken Bicycles"

NIGHT ON EARTH

ISLAND, 1992

★

The soundtrack for a Jim Jarmusch movie, this repeats and stretches out a minor musical theme over and over. There are two new songs, but they're nothing special, and most of this is background instrumentals. Rent the DVD, though it's also far from Jarmusch's best work.

Download: None

High School Musical:
Could we please get
some jocks in here to
beat these kids up?



TWEEN MACHINE

G-RATED DISNEY STARS TURN AN ARENA INTO A ROMPER ROOM

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL: THE CONCERT

RABOBANK ARENA, BAKERSFIELD, CA

DECEMBER 8, 2006 ***

THE FUTURE OF rock & roll dances well, but its jump shot kinda sucks.

It's about 30 minutes into *High School Musical: The Concert*, and the bedlam that began when the cast of the smash Disney Channel movie bounded onstage to the sinisterly perky strains of "Start of Something New" has reached new decibels with "Get'cha Head in the Game," the big basketball number. Sporting sequined uniforms that make them look like a youth team sponsored by Siegfried & Roy, the guys from the East High Wildcats step through choreography that combines sub-'N Sync wiggling with dribbling drills. But when it comes time to shoot the ball, they toss up bricks. This doesn't bother the sold-out crowd of mostly 9-year-olds, who flail glow sticks and chirp along: "Gotta run the give-and-go/And take the ball to the hole/But don't be afraid/To shoot the outside J."

For those who've graduated fourth grade and remain unaware, *High School*

Musical is a G-rated *Romeo and Juliet* romance set amid basketball courts, math competitions and drama-club performances at a New Mexico high school. The soundtrack was the top-selling CD of 2006, which, for many observers of the crisis-racked record business, signaled the onset of End Times. *HSM* is a slick and savvy pop product: clean enough to appease anxious soccer moms and, with its smart blend of pop melody and

lite R&B/hip-hop beats, a reasonable approximation of *TRL* fare.

Onstage, product placement never lets up. Giant screens loop Disney Channel videos and previews for *High School Musical 2* ("Coming in 2007!"). The cast replicates songs like "Bop to the Top" and the cafeteria sing-along "Stick to the Status Quo" on sets right out of the film, but much of the evening is given to "showcases" of material from solo albums

HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL PARKING LOT...



JALEN KELLAMS
AGE 6, BAKERSFIELD, CA

"I WANT TO HEAR 'GET'CHA HEAD IN THE GAME.' THIS ISN'T MY FIRST CONCERT—I'VE BEEN TO *DISNEY ON ICE*."



SAVANNAH WILLWEE
AGE 16, BAKERSFIELD, CA

"I FEEL LIKE AN OLD LADY HERE. AM I THE OLDEST ONE? I'M ALSO A FAN OF REGULAR BANDS, LIKE BLACK EYED PEAS. I DON'T KNOW IF THE YOUNGER KIDS KNOW BLACK EYED PEAS."



RYAN STARR
AGE 7, BAKERSFIELD, CA

"I'M THE BIGGEST VANESSA HUGHENS FAN IN THE WORLD. *HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL* IS MY FAVORITE CD. *HANNAH MONTANA* IS MY SECOND FAVORITE."

by the stars, complete with smarmy hard-sell banter. "I love you so much!" Vanessa Hudgens, the pixieish romantic lead, coos after singing her glossy single "Come Back to Me." "Make sure to pick up my album, V, you guys! It's in stores now!"

Much of the talk about *High School Musical* has surrounded its preposterous chasteness, but the live show lets the genie loose from its bottle a bit. Leggy blonde Ashley Tisdale takes the stage in a "Baby, One More Time"-style schoolgirl outfit, looking like a Vegas pole dancer, and during his thumping solo single "Push It to the Limit," Corbin Bleu executes some piston-pumping pelvic thrusts.

The 18-year-old Hudgens is *HSM*'s breakout star—and not for her clingy little nymphet outfits. Unlike Tisdale and Bleu, she sings powerfully—and without the aid of backing tracks. But the real find is Drew Seeley, subbing for absent dreamboat Zac Efron. Seeley's supple tenor and sleek moves bring to mind former Mouseketeer Justin Timberlake—a reminder that true-blue stars sometimes emerge from the shiny, happy ranks of the Disney pop-industrial complex. Get that understudy a showcase!

By the end, it's clear that the real point of *HSM* isn't to consecrate new stars but to guide the young and impressionable through the rites of pop fandom. It's easy to be cynical about Disney's relentless hucksterism. But the music isn't all that bad: The rickety kiddie-R&B beat of "Get'cha Head in the Game" is kind of funky, and there's a pleasant "Since U Been Gone" rush to the crashing minor chords in Hudgens's "Drive." In five years, when they're old enough to date, *HSM* fans may rip the posters off their bedroom walls and look back in horror—but 15 years down the line, the \$35 T-shirt will be the height of ironic-hipster chic, and probably fetch a pretty penny on eBay. Maybe some of the kids will reimburse their rents. **JODY ROSEN**



Ashley Tisdale:
Like Minnie
Mouse but ... hot.



Hinder's Austin
Winkler, thinking
about boobies.

HINDER-GARTEN

BOOMING HARD-ROCK
BREAKOUTS ACT LIKE GIRLS
HAVE COOTIES

HINDER

MULCAHY'S, WANTAGH, NY

NOVEMBER 21, 2006

IT'S A FEW MINUTES to showtime, and one lucky Hinder fan just hit the jackpot: a half-full bottle of beer orphaned on a nearby ledge. "Whose beer is this?" he asks. Glancing around and getting no reply, he kills it in two gulps and wobbles away. *Score.*

Austin Winkler would be proud. Hinder's 28-year-old frontman advocates a regimen of excess he seems to have learned from Mötley Crüe's tour diaries: louder, drunker, sluttier. Like those X-Games burnouts in *Harold & Kumar*, his watchword is *extreme*—20 seconds into tonight's sold-out show, he's swilling vodka from a red Solo cup and standing atop the monitor, arms outstretched, like the leader of a particularly unruly congregation. A huge one, too: The Oklahoma fivesome conquered the country from the inside out, bypassing the coastal capitals of cool to become the most popular band on MySpace, with a debut album, *Extreme Behavior*, that's sold 1.5 million copies.

"I hope you all get laid tonight," Winkler announces mid-set, "and I hope you never see each other again." For Hinder, love means not having to call the next day. Though he's blessed with a raw, scratchy howl that sounds great live, Winkler's bra-draped micro-

phone stand and Steven Tyler strut make songs like the let's-bang-groupies jam "Room 21" seem parodic. Aiming to "bring the party back to rock & roll," as Winkler tells *Blender*, they're the musical equivalent of a Jäger bomb: macho, over-the-top and hard to remember later on.

The crowd of 1,100 is mostly female, but except for a playfully blow-dried cover of Eddie Money's "Take Me Home Tonight," romance is hard to find. Hinder—who got their big break headlining a *Girls Gone Wild* tour—spike even their makeout songs with a shot of douchebaggery. The lighters-up weeper "Better Than Me" spoils chivalrous sentiment with lines about BJ's in mall dressing rooms; on the Top 5 hit "Lips of an Angel," a Nickelback-ish power ballad about cheating with your ex, the band jackhammers with all the finesse and sexiness of a grudge-fuck.

When Sunset Strip metal bands of the '80s were mean to girls, they leavened it with mascara, skintight leather and other cheeky gender play. The closest Hinder come to androgyny are the frosted tips on guitarist Joe "Blower" Garvey, who appears to be stricken with a chronic case of O-face. So in the set-closing "Get Stoned," when Winkler grunts that "the breakup's worth the makeup sex you're givin' me," you could cringe. Or you could do like the three women near the bar, and just laugh and walk away. **JOSHUELLS**

SEOUL PATROL

SOUTH KOREA'S *THE HOST* BEATS HOLLYWOOD AT ITS OWN MONSTER-MASH GAME (By David Fear)

THE BEST SUMMER movie you'll see this year is about to slither into theaters—only it's coming several months early, you might not find it at your local multiplex, it's as thought-provoking as it is scary, and it's not being released by a major American studio.

THE HOST hails from South Korea, and despite the fact that we've looked to Asia for our serious genre fixes for decades now, director Bong Joon-Ho's nature-run-amok parable will probably be relegated to the subtitled-film ghetto of downtown art houses. But for discerning popcorn munchers seeking the adrenaline rush that comes only from watching large, scaly CGI monsters gobble down innocent bystanders, your prayers have been answered tenfold.

The concept couldn't be more Saturday-matinee B-movie: U.S. Army scientists stationed outside of Seoul dump a mess of toxic chemicals into the drink. Years later, a dim-witted street vendor sees something odd-looking hanging off a bridge. When the tadpolelike creature swims up to the water's edge, picnickers pelt it with garbage. Then it scrambles out of the river, snacks on a few citizens and kicks off an extended sequence of chaotic creature-feature carnage that will make anybody's inner 12-year-old squeal with unbridled delight.

Great monster movies, however, are always about more than the joys of chomping on power lines and passers-by; since real-world disasters have far eclipsed whatever can be cobbled together

with software programs and several million bucks, it's now impossible to view make-believe destruction without seeking deeper meaning. Like Steven Spielberg's recent remake of *War of the Worlds*, this import places the same amount of emphasis on social breakdown

as it does on thrills and chills; but unlike its Hollywood brethren, there's no sense that Authority will save the day.

Once the mutant amphibian disappears into the sewers, the media immediately throw up a smokescreen and the military start quarantining anybody who disagrees with the official "It's a killer virus" explanation.

The fact that the so-called cavalry consists primarily of American soldiers isn't a coincidence, considering the long history of strained relations between the U.S. and South Korea. But it also speaks to a larger paranoia that doesn't begin or end at that country's borders: When shit happens, don't expect help from the government. Horror movies that bring the cultural critique are nothing new, but who expected an action flick to be this much fun *and* make a deformed frog the lesser of two evils?

You won't get much revisionism or blistering social commentary from **THE LOOKOUT**, a simple crime drama that, narratively, is content with sticking to the straight and narrow. Chris Pratt (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) used to be a high school golden boy. A car accident changed all that, and now the former athlete has trouble remembering anything without using a checklist. He does know, however, that he's got to show up for his job as bank janitor every night. Unfortunately, so does a group of thugs who want to rob the place and aren't afraid to take advantage of Pratt's amnesia—and his horniness—for an ex-stripper played by Isla Fisher—

THE EXCITED-O-METER

We haven't seen 'em yet ... and we're not even sure we want to

VERY EXCITED

ZODIAC



Seven's David Fincher looks at the Bay Area's famous serial killer. This time it isn't Kevin Spacey.

EXCITED-ISH

300

This epic of ass-kicking Spartans could be *Gladiator Redux*—or a great big flop in a loincloth.



NOT SO MUCH

WILD HOGS



Watching John Travolta, Tim Allen and Martin Lawrence play aging bikers sounds worse than road rash.

MUSIC DVDS

"No more questions, please, Mr. O'Reilly."



CHICK FLICK

COUNTRY MUSIC POWERHOUSES TURNED PARIAS LEARN THE HARD WAY NOT TO MESS WITH TEXAS

(By David Fear)

SHUT UP & SING

WEINSTEIN COMPANY

★★★★

Never ones to shy away from controversy or refrain from flipping the bird to old-fogey Nashville, the Dixie Chicks bit off more than they could chew when singer Natalie Maines dissed Dubya in 2003. *Shut Up & Sing* follows the aftermath, as the Chicks go from country music's little darlings to outcasts. The doc cuts between the group negotiating the backlash from conservative fans and recording an angry follow-up, *Taking the Long Way*—but like Metallica's portrait of implosion, *Some Kind of Monster*, the result is something bigger than your standard rockumentary. Even if you don't give a rat's ass about the Chicks' blend of new country and sassy estrogen-pop, it's hard to not admire the band's gumption during the shit-storm fallout or their refusal to kowtow to political bullies.

THE BEST OF THE REST

AMERICAN HARDCORE

(SONY PICTURES CLASSICS)

★★

Tracing the punker-than-fuck scene that spawned Minor Threat, Negative Approach, et al. from its tiny underground beginnings in the early '80s to its inevitable flameout several years later, director Paul Rachman includes lots of choice concert footage. But his insistence on simply flip-flopping between regions—here are L.A.'s bands! And here are Boston's! And ... and ...—rather than delineating the music's sociological significance makes you want to scream at a wall: Rise above, dude! Rise above! D.F.

DON'T LOOK BACK

(SHOUT! FACTORY)

★★★★

D A Pennebaker's depiction of a young, brash Bob Dylan on tour in England in 1965 is considered the mother of all rock documentaries, a fly-on-the-wall chronicle of a star on the brink of deityhood that has often been imitated but never bested. The big draw on this deluxe reissue is '65 Revisited, the feature-length assemblage of outtakes that serves as a bizarre-alternative version of *Don't Look Back*, telling the same story from a different angle, or a quasi-sequel—*Don't Look Back 2: Still Totally Not Looking Back*. D.F.

THE U.S. VS. JOHN LENNON

(LIONSGATE)

★★★★

This downright frightening documentary traces the "Bigger Than Jesus" one's battle with the American government over his peacenik politics. Covered are his admittedly silly bed-ins and the unwarranted wiretaps he suffered; a surly Lennon appears in archival footage amid modern-day interviews with George McGovern, conspiracy-theorist extraordinaire Noam Chomsky and ... Geraldo Rivera. Proof that just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you. Lauren Harris

BLENDER APPROVED

The best movies and DVDs of the past months:



PERFUME: THE STORY OF A MURDERER

Tom Tykwer's adaptation of Patrick Süskind's novel smells like a hit!

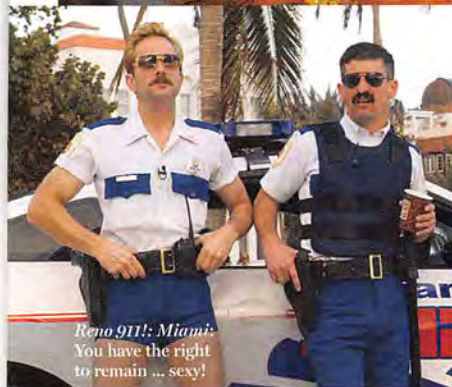


SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

Proof that even in the fabled glory days, they still had shitty sketches in the final 20 minutes.



The Lookout: Joseph Gordon-Levitt takes a timeout.



Reno 911!: Miami. You have the right to remain ... sexy!

to get what they want. As the writer of both *Get Shorty* and *Out of Sight*, Scott Frank carved himself a niche as the bard of post-pulp cinema, but as a director, he's left the formal self-consciousness behind. Which may be why *The Lookout* feels like a letdown: It's no-nonsense storytelling, yet with Frank's track record, you'd think there'd be more to the story than just a plot, a plan and a patsy.

Speaking of crimes: When will folks realize that nothing destroys a funny half-hour TV show more effectively than trying to extend it to feature length? Comedy Central's hilarious *Cops* parody *Reno 911!* is the latest casualty. Like *Strangers With Candy*'s ill-fated attempt to jump to the big screen, **RENO 911! MIAMI** is enough of a buzzkill to turn you off the series altogether. Lt. Dangle and the rest of the misfit sheriff's department from the biggest little city in the world travel to Miami Beach to attend a law-enforcement convention. After a bioterrorist attack, they end up having to police the whole city; cue shenanigans and many, many shots of ill-shaped bodies in tiny thong bikinis. The filmmakers work this threadbare premise for 90 minutes, with the wasted opportunities outnumbering the thimbleful of inspired moments (a long, unedited shot of the entire squad retiring to their motel rooms for a little self-abuse falls into the latter category). What we wouldn't have given for a huge monster to jump out of Biscayne Bay and put the talented cast out of its collective misery.



DAVE GROHL

FOO FIGHTERS

"An Inconvenient Truth. Al Gore's documentary really brought me down, but I think it has important information about the environment that we all need to know."



THE BIG CHILL

IT'S JUST LIKE ANY HIGH-END SHOOT-'EM-UP... ONLY COLDER (By Libe Goad)

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

CAPCOM, XBOX 360

★★★★

EVERY GAME WITH guns is seemingly constructed from the same Chinese-takeout menu: Select an exotic weapon from column A to battle some bloodcurdling enemy from column B. The best ones find a way to subvert, or at least add to, the formula.

The hook in this third-person shooter, as the title hints, is that you play a gun-toting grunt who offs enemies in extremely cold conditions. As if saving mankind weren't enough, our hero must do it while keeping his personal mini-heater from hitting E and figure out how to work the trigger while wearing mittens. And keeping the thermal tank full can be a chore—you have mere seconds to collect helpful warm orange

ICE
CAPADES!

goo expelled from fallen enemies.

Better bring some long Johns—you'll be laying waste to countless snow pirates, robot-like tanks and nasty critters called Akrids, which rise out of the ground at inopportune moments for adrenaline-pumping battles. Or jump into a customizable battle-mech, a.k.a.

a Vital Suit, and vaporize enemies with a high-powered spray of bullets. An online multiplayer mode lets up to 16 people blow each other up in creative ways, but the Vital Suit is probably the best of them all.

An all too familiar aliens-killed-my-pa-then-I-got-amnesia plot ties the pieces together, though it's hard to get too invested when most of the characters look like they've been dressed in Prince's winter wardrobe. If a ski vacation is beyond the budget this year, *Lost Planet* is a lot cheaper, and there's always plenty of fresh powder. Gunpowder, but still.

GIZMO OF THE MONTH

NINTENDO Wii CONTROLLER GLOVE

GAME FANS, Wii HAVE A PROBLEM—REMOTE GRIPS ARE THE SOLUTION

Within weeks of Wii's release, sweaty-palmed players had managed to swing the motion-sensing remote with such force that it went flying—destroying countless TVs and lava lamps. This deceptively simple silicone sleeve—a game prophylactic, if you will—slips over the Wiimote and provides a secure rubbery gripping surface. It comes in blue, pink, silver or black and includes a matching wrist strap—but sadly is not ribbed for your pleasure (\$20, daine.com).



METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE OPS

KONAMI, PSP

★★★★

In true Jerry Bruckheimer fashion, the world's stealthiest badass wakes up in jail and escapes to recruit a small army in order to, *sigh*, save the world from impending doom. The next 20 hours consist of semi-tedious troop management. All hope is not lost, though, since there's still plenty of the standard *Metal Gear* tiptoeing around enemies, and, as always, getting spotted means game over.

ELEBITS

KONAMI, Wii

★★★★

This trippy action game requires using the motion-sensing Wiimote to retrieve on-strike Elebits—little critters that control electricity—and put them back to work. Instead of negotiating with a union boss, you get the job done by going room to room in a suburban house with an antigravity gun that sends furniture flying and zapping the 'Bits as they scurry. The game gets old, but not before you've played the rock-star-in-hotel-room angle, flipping over couches and ripping doors off hinges.

TONY HAWK'S DOWNHILL JAM

ACTIVISION, Wii

★★★★

The most popular skating game on the planet gets a simplified spin-off for the Wii. Tilt the remote control left and right to race down hills while pulling off jumps, grabs and other sweet tricks to earn points—and fill up the "zone bone" meter for major speed boosts.



As in all other Hawk games, he makes an appearance, as does a soundtrack that includes Ministry, Iron Maiden and Mötörhead.

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES

SEGA, PS3

★★

Anyone who's dreamed of shooting a rocket through freeway traffic can safely live out that fantasy in this car-combat redux. Pick from a garage full of generic rides (no name-brand company will let its cars get blasted to scrap), outfit them with missiles, grenade launchers, et al., and take to the streets to wreak havoc. The cool time-reversing unwreck mode and a new story-driven plot don't quite keep the novelty from wearing off fast.

BLAZING ANGELS: SQUADRONS OF WWII

UBISOFT, PS3, Wii

★★

Starting before Pearl Harbor, this

WWII reenactment takes would-be pilots and their wingmen to North Africa, Paris and Berlin, downing Nazi scum along the way—and attempts to create an emotional bond between you and the computer-controlled wingmen, but we barely bat an eye when they get shot down.

NCAA MARCH MADNESS 07

EA SPORTS, 360, PS2

★★★★

It's only appropriate that Charlotte's Adam "Cry Baby" Morrison appears on the cover of a basketball game that brings each player's composure front-and-center. As the pressure builds, the Intensity Meter rises—more confident players will use the momentum to pump up the fans and teammates. Ballers with less confidence take a performance hit. In addition to all the emotional stuff, the game is sharp-looking and comprehensive.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best games from the past months



GEARS OF WAR

MICROSOFT, XBOX 360

They've done the impossible: stolen the online-shooter crown from Halo.



LUMINES II

BUENA VISTA GAMES, PSP, PS2

Who'd have thought Tetris plus Gwen Stefani tunes equaled digital crack?

Jibbs: Chain may hang low, yet cap is perched high.



GEEK FILES

THE KIDS TODAY LOVE THEM SOME VIDEO GAMES, AND 16-YEAR-OLD **JIBBS** IS NO EXCEPTION. THE "CHAIN HANG LOW" RAPPER LETS HIS DWEBB FLAG FLY

LAST GOOD GAME PLAYED

Fight Night Round 3, on Xbox 360. I come from a boxing family. I was boxing before I was rapping, so I can get with that game.

FAVORITE CLASSIC GAME

I love *Mortal Kombat*. I play against my hypeman, C-4. And I gotta play as Liu Kang. He does that jump kick three times. I just kill everybody with that. People would be like, "Man, why you cheating?" I'd just dominate everyone, and I was like, 11. And I play *Tetris* on my Sidekick in my off-time, when I ain't writing or anything. I never get tired of *Tetris*.

POSTSHOW PASTIME: GAMES OR GROUPIES?

The game room, without a doubt. That's just, like, a dream come true right there. I mean, a room full of video games? You would never get bored after that, most definitely.

A JIBBS GAME WOULD LOOK LIKE

I'd be a character you could play, but I'd want there to be something for everybody. I'd want my game to switch up—go from a driving game to a boxing game to a fighting game, so people never get tired of it. You don't have to buy other games, just buy every copy of this.

PIXELATED OBJECT OF DESIRE

Again, *Mortal Kombat*: Sonya. Yeah. She just it. She look like she could be a real person.

GEEK RATING, ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN

Five. I don't really have a lot of time to play video games. If I had more time, it'd be like eight, 'cause I want to keep beating everybody.

GABE SORIA

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I love making people feel good about themselves and treat them like gold. I expect to be treated the same way. I'm looking for someone in my age range (28).

TEXT: BR JUDITH to number: 46898

TEXT: BR JUDITH to number: 898739



I am a divorced mom of 3 teenagers. I am looking for a nice, honest, funny man, to chat and maby more. I really like Larry the Cable Guy types of men.

TEXT: BR WILMA to number: 46898

TEXT: BR WILMA to number: 898739



Energetic, honest, hardworking woman who plays fair and loves long is looking for a real gentleman. I've been told that I'm pretty easy on the eyes and have a great smile

TEXT: BR GINGER to number: 46898

TEXT: BR GINGER to number: 898739



I am a attractive 25 year old female who likes to hang out with anyone who is real, honest, and not afraid to speak thier minds, whatever may be on it.

TEXT: BR SHELBY to number: 46898

TEXT: BR SHELBY to number: 898739



... I know you exist
You are just looking for me and its all about timing!
You have loved and got hurt.. you have dated endlessly and want more than serial dating!

TEXT: BR BRITNEY to number: 46898

TEXT: BR BRITNEY to number: 898739



I am an easy going, bright, beautiful, sexy SBF. I am looking for a nice simple date with a handsome SWM. If you want to know more just drop me a line. All responses will be answered

TEXT: BR MEGAN to number: 46898

TEXT: BR MEGAN to number: 898739

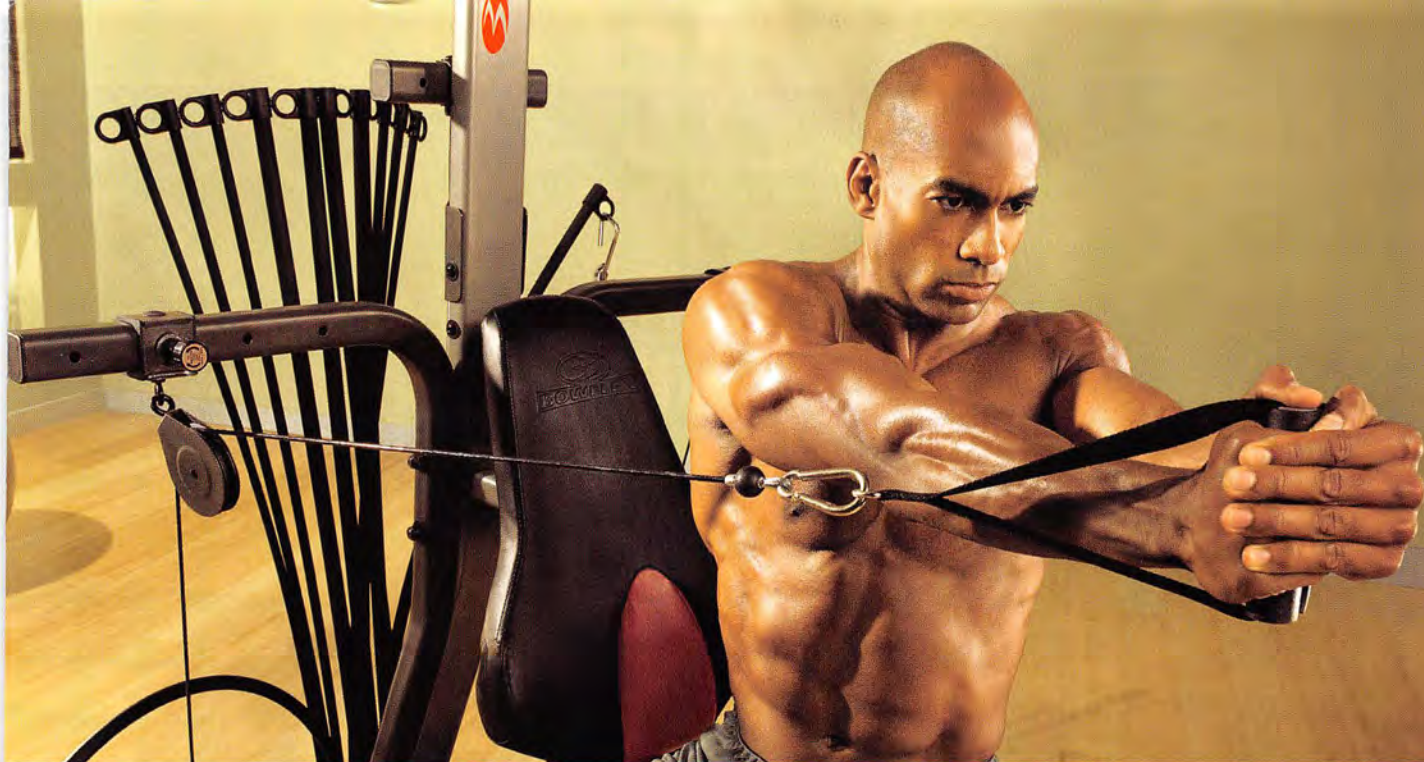
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THE FALL OUT BOY BASSIST HAS MORE PILLS IN HIM THAN A RITE AID, PALS AROUND WITH JAY-Z AND HAS BEEN KNOWN TO PARTAKE IN "GANG SHOWERS." ALL OF WHICH BRINGS US (UNCOMFORTABLY) CLOSE TO UNDERSTANDING ...

By Jonah Weiner • Photograph by Chris Buck

Who Does Pete Wentz Think He Is?

THERE'S A LOT GOING ON IN YOUR SELF-PORTRAIT. WHAT DO THOSE SYMBOLS REPRESENT?

The Rx above my head is for being a drugstore cowboy. I'm the kind of person who thinks he knows more than anybody about everything, so with medication, doctors will say one thing, and I'm like, Eh, I'll just mix and match. It totally gets me in trouble. I just wake up and projectile vomit. The dollar sign is for the "emogul" perception of me. And the broken heart is for the whole Kurt Cobain, dude-is-perpetually-down impression people have of me.

BASICALLY, YOU'RE A DRUG-ADDLED, DEPRESSIVE MILLIONAIRE.

It's a caricature. But there's some truth in there.

IS THAT YOUR DOG IN THE PICTURE?

Yes! Hemingway. He's an English bulldog. I love him, but he pisses and craps wherever he wants—he totally runs the house. He's on my schedule, too. We go to bed at 4 A.M. and wake up at noon.

EXCUSE US WHILE WE CALL THE ASPCA.

Well, I heard from a dog trainer that when you have an abused dog they'll hide when they go to the bathroom. He'll go to the bathroom anywhere, so I think I have a pretty un-abused dog.

IT'S 11 P.M. ON A TYPICAL EVENING. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Usually 10 P.M. comes and I'm like, I'm not going out. Around 10:30 I start saying, Hmm, maybe I should go out. In L.A. you have to be out by 11 'cause everything ends at 2. So I'll convince myself to go out. I'll hit one or two places where they'll give me a free gaming system or something. I'll hear, "Corporate sponsor blah blah blah is having a party, and if you show up, they'll give you this." The PlayStation 3 is totally worth 15 minutes of my time.

JAY-Z LOVES FALL OUT BOY. WHAT'S YOUR BEST HOLY-SHIT-I'M-HANGING-OUT-WITH-JAY-Z STORY?

We'll go out and eat when he's in L.A. It takes 20 minutes for the this-is-Jay-Z thing to wear off, then it's just cool. It's funny, he'll ask me, "Who's the biggest band in rock?" And I'll say, "Green Day." And he's like, "Pfft! You gotta say yourself, man!"

WHAT DO PEOPLE WHO DON'T LIKE YOU SAY ABOUT YOU?

Most of what I hear begins with anti-gay slurs, but online, you know, I get "He's so fag." I didn't even get what that was for a bit! Even if you have thick skin, they always find that one thing. You know, I'll be like, Everything's fine—unless there's naked pictures of me online. And then there they are!

IS THERE ANY UPSIDE TO HAVING PHOTOS OF YOUR PENIS ALL OVER THE INTERNET?

It's liberating! I have no qualms about the gang showers that happen on arena tours, and at photo shoots I'll just change in front of people, and, you know, when I meet girls, they already know what the machinery is like ...

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TASTE IN SEX?

I tend to be a bit prudish. I'm a make-out king—I'll kiss anybody—but as far as going further than that, I wanna keep my number down. I don't wanna tell my future wife, "Yeah, I've been with, like, 50 people." But when I'm with somebody, the caveman in me wants it to be completely deviant. Like, "Oh, this isn't supposed to go in there? Then that's where it has to go."

SO, MAKE-OUT KING, YOU'VE KISSED BOYS?

I have. Anybody above the waist is totally fair game.

IF WE GAVE YOU A DRUG TEST RIGHT NOW, WHAT WOULD WE FIND?

Well, I'm out of Ambien. But you'd find Lorazepam, which is basically Xanax; Flexeril, which is a muscle relaxant; Seroquel; and I think there would probably be Zoloft in there. I told you, I'm the drugstore cowboy.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU HIT SOMEONE?

My last real physical fight was with Patrick, our singer, on the road, years ago. I strangled him against our van. I had been up forever and was totally out of my head and he said something about me being crazy or something. I have a short fuse, but it doesn't work out, 'cause I'm, like, four-foot-seven. Usually my fight stance is to run away and let my friends fight.

ALL RIGHT, TOUGH GUY. WHAT'S THE FIRST LINE OF YOUR OBITUARY GOING TO SAY?

I think about this all the time. I'm death-obsessed. That's why I die in our new video. I want my obituary to be like a glorified *Royal Tenenbaums* thing: PETE WENTZ DIED VALIANTLY SAVING THOUSANDS OF LIVES. But I'm guessing it's gonna be really short and end with, WHO CARES? [BLENDER]



* Remember: Don't let me hear you say life's taking you nowhere.



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the newest MP3 players to the most powerful car audio systems.

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